THE ROCKLITZ

GEORGE PREEDY

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THE ROCKLITZ

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

GENERAL CRACK

THE BODLEY HEAD

THE ROCKLITZ

BY

GEORGE R. PREEDY (pseud.)

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PREFACE

THOSE who would care to find what learned men have made of the story of Magdalena Sibylla von Neitschütz can satisfy themselves by turning to *Geheime Geschichten* (Vol. III) by Bülau, but her contemporaries and my friends, Sir William Colt, George Stepney, Thomas Burnet of Kennet and the great Baron Gottfried Leibnitz, have assured me of very different circumstances from those Bülau records; I think, though they are very guarded in their expressions, that my friends had some compassion and even admiration for this brief luminary; they are not at all averse to her story being told again; they (and especially the relative of the Bishop of Salisbury) were exasperated by Bülau's omission of the account of her two brothers and, how, they ask, could he have confused Françoise de Rosny with Ursula Margaretha von Neitschütz, who died when her daughter was an infant?

These gentlemen have helped me search the galleries of Europe and the portfolios of collectors for a portrait of Magdalena Sibylla; they were very anxious that it should be realized how very beautiful she was; Sir William Colt can remember a portrait of her that she gave him for the King of England, which he sent through the Earl of Portland. . . . We found nothing.

They were vexed . . . can the dust lie so thickly on what was so burningly radiant?

Those who knew her are surprised that she should be so soon forgotten, but I reminded them that it was all gone like a flash of wildfire . . . and that others as notable as Magdalena Sibylla have met the complete defeature of Time. Sir William, however, assures me that the Italian piece of which Johann George IV was enamoured is extremely like the lady, this one-time ornament of the cabinet of the Elector of Saxony (of the Wettin line) is now in the Borghese Gallery, Rome; it is named "Leda" (foolishly, I

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think) and given to the chronicler of the ways of genius, Giorgio Vasari . . . to look at this picture, I am told, is to look at the face of Magdalena Sibylla von Neitschütz . . . this I can and like to believe.

The shadow of the Koenigsberg falls heavily across these pages; this terrible prison is not one with the awful fortress of Koenigstein (some miles from Dresden), but a gloomy and sinister building that was destroyed soon after the internecine struggle on the plains of Leipsic. Sir William Colt and George Stepney, who used to pass it daily (or see it daily), have carefully described it to me; the château at Arnsdorf and the cottage on the Bächnitz road have both disappeared; vineyards grow over the sites; but the Marienkirche remains, and that is not without its memories of this tale; I have seen also the MS. of a *Rondo alla Turca,* by Delphicus de Haverbeck and much admired the delicate, neat scoring.

In the "Grüne Gewölb" in Dresden can still be seen many of the treasures with which Fräulein von Neitschütz adorned her apartments and her person, among them the golden egg with which she bought such tragic wares; I believe that Baron Leibnitz was thinking of this story when he wrote:

Nothing is lost, according to my Philosophy; and not only do all simple substances such as souls, preserve themselves, but, what is more, all actions remain in Nature, however transitory they may appear to our eyes, and all the foregoing enter into all the subsequent ones.

The tale proves, at least, an apt illustration to the dictum, for here we see one action breed another, and a deed of dishonour increase in its consequences till it has poisoned and blasted the young, the brave, the lovely, like the late sharp snow and frost of April, 1693, blighted the fruit trees and vineyards on the banks of the Elbe, along the Bächnitz road, and near Château Arnsdorf.

THE AUTHOR.

" What win I if I gain the Thing I seek ?
A Dream, a Breath, a froth of Fleeting Joy ?
Who buys a minute's Mirth to wail a Week ?
Or sells Eternity to gain a Toy ?
For one sweet Grape who will the Vine Destroy ?
Or, what Fond Beggar, but to touch the Crown,
Would with the Sceptre straight be Strucken Down ? "

(*The Rape of Lucrece*, WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.)

" And yet, ' says he, " I dare engage these creatures have their titles and Distinctions of Honour. . . . They make a Figure in Dress and Equipage, they Love, they Fight, they Dispute, they Cheat, they Betray ! "

(*A Voyage to Brobdingnag*, JONATHAN SWIFT.)

THE ROCKLITZ

PROLOGUE

The children were sporting round the fountain, trailing their hands in the water that completely filled but never over-brimmed the basin of greenish stone, throwing bright balls through the tall jets which overturned in veils of spray, and floating small paper craft on the confined tides made by their lusty rufflings of a surface they had found placid save for the falling drops returning to their source. Behind the fountain was a hornbeam hedge, twice the height of a man, behind that a level row of wych-elms, three times the height of a man, each pruned, clipped with nice topiary art; this double screen of green kept the descending September sun from the group of children; they frolicked in a mellow shade. From a stone bench before the hedge a youth watched them; the four boys did not appear to know that he was there; but the one girl looked at him now and then with kindly candour, and he smiled in response.

It was the close of her birthday festival; she was garlanded, over the knot of fine muslin that formed her cap, with a wreath of buds and blooms in seed pearls and silver; her tight-laced gown was, instead of the usual brown or grey, a pale azure satin; her little shoes were new and fastened with ribbons with gilt tags, her tiny neck was encircled by the heavy glitter of her dead mother's diamonds, a slight string, but too sparkling for her; she was twelve years old; she ruled her four companions, directing their games, exacting her own desires, insisting on her own pleasures, but gently, with caresses and soft appeals.

When she glanced towards the young spectator, idling with his fingers in a book, she seemed to seek his applause of the skill with which she managed her little empire, and even to invite him to become of the company of her slaves.

But he was eight years her senior and grave; he paid no tribute to the charms and graces of the child who appeared on the verge of becoming a grown maiden; who was so delicious, so soft, delicate and fine, whose ribbons were already knotted with such coquetry, whose apron was tied to show off her waist, whose gala skirts gleamed over prettily chosen laces, whose every pose and look and action revealed uncommon beauties and the most sedulous training. Two of the boys, eagerly watching the wreck of their paper boats in the splashing spray, were her brothers; handsome, noisy lads over whom she had an easy mastery; her tender arts were directed to her guests, one of her own age, one younger, who jealously competed for her esteem.

She sat on the edge of the fountain and trailed the tips of her fingers in the water; she was wetted with the spray, crystals of water hung on her attire, on her rosy face, brighter than the little diamonds round her neck; she was very fair; her head showed a glimpse of silver-gold from piled-up curls through the meshes of her cap; her eyes were a clear light brown, that her lovers, with an easy conscience, would be able to call gold; she was as neat, as exact, as charming, as some little doll on whom a great lady had bestowed all the luxury and elegance of her rich leisure.

The governess came round the hornbeam hedge; the young man rose from his bench and looked at her with distaste; he thought that her presence darkened this hour of delicious sunshine, of laughing play, of careless idleness.

Bowing, he acknowledged the presence of Madame de Rosny, who curtseyed formally, saying slowly:

"It is rather chilly, is it not, Monsieur de Haverbeck? And I think the children have played long enough with the water."

She was a woman of a notable deportment; it was easy to see where the little girl had learnt her air of breeding and decorum, who had trained her to wear her fragments of frocks with an air, to step lightly, to allow no shrill note in her voice, to be at once proud and affable, dignified and caressing—Madame de Rosny was extremely competent in all these matters; a widow

of forty-five, her studied elegance neither disclaimed poverty nor assumed riches; her discretion was unfailing, her tact perfect; she knew her place and her value; though, in this household of a widower, her authority was supreme; she had never vexed the most truculent by the exercise of it; her well-featured face was composed to a refined negation of all the passions, but her figure, not ill-displayed by her simple russet taffetas, was voluptuous; Delphicus de Haverbeck, the youth who had risen at her approach, had always detested her; he was surprised that she lingered to speak to him, surveying him from cool eyes, choosing her words with precision.

"I have scarcely seen you since you returned from Paris. You were diverted, instructed?"

"Both, madame."

"You find Saxony dull?"

"No, madame."

"You are entering the army?" She continued to study him with a gaze of chilly experience, for he was extremely handsome.

"Yes, I have my fortune to make." He was as cold as she; though he was twenty years of age he had none of the hesitancies, crudenesses, or discomposures of youth.

"Ah, yes." Her smile was thin, her scrutiny more persistent. "You are changed, eh? Five years ago since you were playing with these little ones. They, too, have changed—Clement, Casimir—they, too, begin to talk of the army, of making their fortunes"—her sneer vanquished her smile—"a pity, mon Dieu, that the House of Neitschütz has not more money!"

Delphicus de Haverbeck turned away; he realized that she suspected he had heard much to her discredit in Paris; she would not be greatly concerned at that, he thought, for she was independent of her reputation, but it could make her cynical, indifferent to her usual disguises of propriety and prudery; she spoke again, to his averted face, for he was gazing at the children by the fountain:

"And the little Madelon, do you not find her changed too?

Very pretty, very accomplished; I can claim some credit there—observe her now with the little Princes, they are quite her subjects. Johann Georg adores her, eh?"

"I have been watching that," said Delphicus de Haverbeck indifferently; "they have been much together."

He faced Madame de Rosny as he spoke and she resumed her gaze; he was certainly extremely handsome.

"A great deal—here and in Dresden, he was very shy, timid, *gauche,* eh? And my little Madelon has done more than all his tutors to improve him—the Elector is very grateful."

Haverbeck returned her challenge so steadily, with such assurance, opposed so disdainful a silence to her mocking words, that she was reduced to vexed laughter.

"You have certainly learnt something at Versailles," she said, detesting him, then walked meekly to her charges, with curtsies for the little Princes, with gentle commands for the others, with the softest of rebukes for wet ruffles and damp ribbons.

When she had joined that gay and innocent company, Haverbeck found no pleasure in contemplating it; he walked slowly across the small well-kept gardens to the small well-kept château, everything was slightly pretentious; Haverbeck knew that a considerable effort was behind this restricted display of pride, parterres, terraces, statues, ornate gateways, massive coats of arms in stone above doorways and windows; and, to the young man returned from the wide magnificence of Paris, of Marli, St. Germain and Fontainebleau, it was all provincial, rather mean; yet dear and familiar, for he had passed a not unhappy childhood on this estate with those three companions much younger than himself, now sporting by the fountain; he was their second cousin, better born, early orphaned, possessed of the most meagre of fortunes and the most steadfast of ambitions; his handsome bearing and his cool assurance had gained him five years in the family of another relative in France, but his poverty and his foreign birth had closed channels of advancement in Paris and he had returned to Saxony and a lieutenancy in the army of the

Elector; he was not perturbed by the thought of the future, nor indeed by anything whatever.

As he reached the château he saw Major-General von Neitschütz on the terrace with the Elector—in close obsequious attendance on His Highness, who was stupid, easy, gross, the father of the two blond boys playing with little Madelon von Neitschütz, and one of the highest Princes in the Empire.

Haverbeck pitied the proud, hard, grasping man forced to supplicate the favour of one in everything but rank his inferior; Neitschütz must consider this visit as the greatest honour, must demean himself with grateful humility because his daughter's festival was thus graced; and Haverbeck knew that he really despised the Elector and bitterly considered himself vilely used by him, because he had saved his life at Seneffe and had never been rewarded; Haverbeck, who was as intelligent as he was handsome, also knew that this neglect was owing to the influence of Count Stürm, who completely governed the Elector and hated Neitschütz. When Haverbeck had been an inmate of Château Arnsdorf his youthful shrewdness had noted the tenacious struggle, stern, bitter, exasperated, of Neitschütz to maintain his influence with the Elector, to oppugn the cold hostility of the minister, Count Stürm, who would tolerate no rival or colleague in the cabinet at Dresden; Neitschütz, harsh, soured, unattractive, aggressive and passionate, trained in the camp and harassed by poverty, hampered by a family, with no merits beyond his high birth and the energy of his tormenting ambition, had never been able successfully to combat Stürm —subtle, amiable, pleasing, artful, schooled in diplomacy, wealthy and childless; with no responsibilities to harry him, with no embittered passions to torture him, a cool, able, experienced man who had made himself indispensable to his Prince and who had without difficulty thwarted the pretensions of Neitschütz. . . . If, at this moment the Elector honoured Château Arnsdorf it was, no doubt, because of the lovely charms of little Madelon who had fascinated his dull and awkward Electoral Highness

into a more manly temper. . . . Haverbeck wondered what Count Stürm thought of this development.

The September sunshine gave an air of sweet laziness to the prospect, to the formal gardens where the more delicate trees were thinning in their foliage, to the solid grey façade of the château, to the empty walks and seats; the air was soft, still, the sky veiled with radiance; Haverbeck found some enchantment in this jocund peace; he lingered on the narrow terrace, evading Neitschütz and the Elector who were discussing glasshouses and the merits of the yellow diamond or jargonelle pear; Neitschütz was tall, of a grand, imposing presence, overbearing and severe in his stiff uniform, a man of fifty with heavy features and eyes still golden bright beneath scowling brows, subdued and bent to complaisance and flattery, servile and forcedly courteous to the Elector, whose clumsy person only came to his shoulder, whose wide, flat, red face, with snub nose and loose mouth, clouded eyes and narrow forehead, expressed only stupidity, obstinacy, vanity and a vague good humour.

"I," said Haverbeck to himself, "will not rise by any such means as that—how disgusting to cringe for favour!"

He heard the laughing, quarrelling protests of children coming across the garden; he entered the mansion and, in a vestibule crowded with sham Roman bustos, paused and reflected:

"Where is there one simple honest soul who will tell me the truth?"

He recalled Agostino Steffani, the overworked, insolently-treated tutor, an ill-paid, timid man—patient, industrious, ingenuous, from whom Haverbeck had learnt much; he had made a hesitant appearance at the beginning of the festival when he had handed Madelon a little gift of books; since then no one had seen him or missed him; Haverbeck went to the library where he had studied all his own early lessons and there discovered Signor Steffani feeding some caged linnets with millet seed.

This room, where Madame de Rosny never came, that was occupied only by the gentle pedant and the children, had a far

more genial air than the other departments, formal and gaudy, of the château; Haverbeck was pleased to return to this chamber where in five years nothing had altered save to become more shabby, and of which he had warmly affectionate memories; the youth had only loved two people in Château Arnsdorf, and one of them was Maestro Steffani.

The little Italian trembled with gratification at the gracious visit and the gracious greeting of the splendid young man; modestly as Agostino rated himself, he was treated even beneath his own valuation; he had an enemy in Madame de Rosny and knew that Neitschütz only tolerated him because his services were both excellent and cheap; his mild, gentle, sensitive soul took refuge in music, in books, in birds . . . not in cages, however, the linnets were prisoners of necessity, because little Casimir had snared them and cut their wings. . . .

Haverbeck sauntered round the familiar room; there was the old *mappamondo,* yellow, crinkled; there were the thumbed Latin and Greek volumes snug on the deep shelves; he took one from its place, opened it and read his name on the fly-leaf, eh, the pride with which he had written that—ten years ago. . . .

"Delphicus Secundus Hyacinthus Lüneburg de Haverbeck, 1674."

He laughed, and Steffani, regarding him with humble delighted admiration, laughed in sympathy; the rich honey-yellow sunshine filled the dark room, showed up the dusty, worn chairs and tables, the rubbed books, the blackened portraits of members of the House of Neitschütz that frowned above the shelves, and on the spruce slenderness and glowing beauty of the young man who had yet all the bloom of the very May of life; he was tall, healthy, dark, alert, yet composed; serene, not placid; self-assured, not vain; his features were of a notable exactitude, and the long, fashionable, carefully-dressed curls, black save when in the sunlight, that hung on to his shoulders, added to his modish elegance; the Maestro thought him marvellously delightful to behold—always had Haverbeck been his favourite pupil. Casimir and Clement were wilful and stupid, while he did not enjoy

teaching girls, and Madelon was disconcerting; she impinged on his studious quiet, she involved him in a world from which he had long since withdrawn.

Haverbeck glanced again at the fly-leaf of the *Germanicus Tacitus,* a name was scrawled in an uncertain childish hand beneath his own:

"Magdalena Sibylla von Neitschütz—Madelon—"

Steffani, peering over his arm, said:

"She writes better than that now, she writes very well, she does everything very well."

"She has been precisely trained," answered Haverbeck, "she was always intelligent."

The meek pedant extolled Magdalena Sibylla—her quickness, her energy, her aptitude for all manner of learning, her eagerness for Greek and Latin, her gift for music, her deftness at the embroidery frame, in the dance, her superiority to her brothers.

"There," put in Haverbeck, "is the sting for my uncle. The boys give no great promise."

Steffani shrugged and grimaced.

"Clement is mediocre, Casimir is lazy, he does not tell the truth—they are both selfish and hard. General von Neitschütz pampered and indulged them, as you recall—"

"At my expense," smiled Haverbeck. "He gave a sharp edge to all his favours to me."

"I recall there has always been an element of bitterness in this house, no one has been really happy here; now that the boys disappoint his expectations the General is harsh with them and they defy him with insolence until he subdues them by force."

Haverbeck returned the *Tacitus* to the shelf and glanced idly out of the window at the garden and the fields beyond, shimmering in the autumn sunshine.

"What part has Madame de Rosny in this?" he asked.

"With the boys—no part," returned the pedagogue uneasily, "they have outgrown her care—"

"But Madelon, eh?"

"Madelon is Madame de Rosny's especial charge; she has taught her a great deal."

"Not too much, I hope."

Steffani was silent, he opened the harpsichord that stood before the window and looked at the double keyboard as if he took comfort from the face of a friend; not for long could he keep from some manner of music; there was a flute in the room, a violin, and an ancient table virginals painted with cracked and faded flowers.

"I heard," added Haverbeck, "something of Madame de Rosny in Paris—her reputation is as decayed as her family."

"She is well-bred. She offends no one."

"Has she great influence with my uncle?"

"Eh, well, she has been with him since his wife died—ten years."

"Madelon always in her hands. When I lived here I did not understand."

"That is better," said the Maestro wistfully. "There is no scandal—the strictest decorum—better not to understand."

Haverbeck looked at him.

"What shall we think of a man who allows his mistress to educate his daughter? A corrupt woman when he found her among the camp followers in Brussels!"

"Hush, that is not known here."

"I know it. I thought today Madelon had some glances that woman had taught her."

"No, no." Steffani was troubled, vehement; he gazed at the yellow keyboards; the old ivory, cracked and stained, was the colour of his own long, pallid, wrinkled face under the black cap. "Madelon is brought up in the sternest honour, she has her father's sole attention now he is disgusted with the boys; Madame de Rosny stays largely because she knows how to train a gentlewoman."

Haverbeck interrupted sternly:

"Madelon is twelve today, in a few years she also will understand—what then?"

"Then Madame de Rosny will go. She ages, and he is almost tired of her."

"Turned off with a month's fee in her pocket and hatred in her heart? He'll do that? Vile and mean!"

"You know Neitschütz," said the Maestro uneasily. "He has no tendernesses, he is devoured by this ambition—an odd passion to me—to rule Saxony, to be in Count Stürm's place—"

Haverbeck once more interrupted:

"How is Madelon to help him to that?"

"Well, the Electoral Prince has taken a violent fancy for her, when he was sick he would not eat till she was brought to him, he would not do his lessons till she helped him, I have had them here, morning after morning, he has some parts and she can strangely stimulate him, he grows to lean on her. It is not," added the old man shrewdly, "only the dawning passion of a youth for a maiden, it is the domination of a strong mind over a weak one."

"Does my uncle dream of a marriage?" asked Haverbeck.

"I believe he stakes on it; he knows the boys will never do anything, but she—she will be, no doubt, a wonderful creature."

"But a marriage with the Electoral Prince—it is absurd. Count Stürm would prevent it, even if the Elector was persuaded."

"I do not know," answered the Maestro wearily. "I stand apart in this house, but I cannot evade what comes before my eyes. For years have I watched the General struggling for advancement, blocked by Stürm, and seen him drop deeper into difficulties, I know the shifts and economies that go on here, his estate of Gaussig is sold and that of Diemen mortgaged—all gone on flourishing at Dresden in the winter then the money spent on Madelon these last few years since he saw she was to be a beauty—dresses, horses, dancing masters, jewels, even, and sometimes hardly enough on the table and the servants unpaid—"

Haverbeck interrupted:

"Madelon was a noble-minded child—has all this changed too?"

"I do not know. I cannot read her, she is very gay and courteous, but as ambitious as her father, and avid for pleasure and luxury."

"Madame de Rosny cannot have taught her honour," said Haverbeck sadly. "An ambitious woman! That has an ill sound."

Steffani explained himself as if he feared he had been less than fair to his pupil.

"She is exceptional—clear-headed, alert-minded, full of energy and resource, born surely to rule and sway other people; she has already great control; her passions are well under—"

"You mean that Madame de Rosny has taught her duplicity?"

The Maestro had no answer to this; the haze of warm sunshine had faded from the room, leaving it dark and chilly; the heavy bookshelves receded into shadow and the portraits of the members of the Neitschütz family were no longer distinguishable from their frames.

"Talk of yourself," said Steffani, rising. "I hoped you would find some opening in Paris."

"I might have, through the women, but I will not succeed by favour of another man's mistress. There will be war soon and I shall do very well."

"Another war?"

"Nothing else is talked of in Paris. Everyone is tired of the peace, which gives no opportunity to a gentleman."

"You are staying here?"

"If at all, only for tonight. I must go to Dresden for my uniforms, and to join my regiment."

Steffani regarded him wistfully and regretfully; so many brilliant advantages of mind and body, a birth so ancient, to win no more than a lieutenancy in the Life Guards. . . . But the young man seemed neither disappointed nor dismayed; he said affectionately:

"You have worked very hard here, Maestro, and been neglected. When I have established my fortunes I will take you

into my service, and you shall be my *virtuoso*—you know how I love music."

Steffani was greatly moved by this generous offer, even though it came from a penniless subaltern; he seized and caressed the young man's slender hand.

"No doubt," smiled Haverbeck, "my uncle will turn you off as well as Madame de Rosny, but I will provide for you; in a few years I shall be able to do so."

"I don't deserve that," said the poor pedant, "I never did much for you."

"Everything! I never forgot what I learnt from you—"

"You were such an excellent pupil." Steffani sighed, thinking of Casimir and Clement. "You had a wonderful head for mathematics—you've kept that up? Indispensable for a soldier."

"I have taken great care to equip myself at every point," Haverbeck assured him. "I also have my ambitions. Now, patience, dear Maestro, and rely on me. Write to me sometimes at Dresden."

"I will, I will—I shall be honoured."

Haverbeck clasped the old, chilly fingers in his warm grasp, then said, thoughtfully and earnestly:

"Watch over Madelon—do what you can."

The old pedant answered sadly:

"I will do what I can. It will be little."

"Instruct her in honour at every opportunity. I know she has a noble heart."

Haverbeck heard, as he left the library, voices from the courtyard, glanced through a window on the stairs and saw the Electoral coach and escort preparing for departure; he joined the group in the entrance hall; Major-General von Neitschütz was taking ceremonious leave of the Elector; he had an air of exasperated triumph, as one who has succeeded at the cost of infinite fatigue; Madame de Rosny had Madelon by the hand; she effaced herself gracefully; her russet gown was one with the background; imperceptibly she put the child forward; it was

Madelon's turn to take leave of the Elector; as the little girl advanced Madame de Rosny whipped off her cap and coronal; a multitude of tiny curls, a paler gold than her bright eyes, fell on to her delicate neck and shoulders; Haverbeck, watching, bit his lip. The Elector paused; Madelon was directly in his path; illuminated by the last warm daylight that fell through the open door, her face was softly flushed, her eyes, her hair, her little satin frock, gleamed; she was all brightness and grace, airy, exquisite in her radiant innocence and candour; she curtsied in the prettiest fashion and thanked His Highness for his gift of a crystal box and his presence at her festival.

The Elector smiled, patted her head, touched her chin, was gracious, nodded at Neitschütz, agreed she was charming, charming; the Electoral Prince, blond, emotional, not ungraceful, with something of his father's flat, wide features, yet comely, took reluctant farewells and with agitation begged for a kiss.

Madelon gave him her hand; the Elector vowed, laughing, that she had been well taught; he delayed his going to stare at her; she bent to his second son, Frederic Augustus, a beautiful child of seven, and lavished on that baby face the caress she was now old enough to deny others; Haverbeck observed her lovely endearments, her delicate kisses, as the laughing boy nestled to her throat and bosom—frank innocence?—he glanced at Madame de Rosny, obscured in the shadow.

The Electoral party went into the courtyard; His Highness in one coach, with outriders, running footmen and an escort of Uhlans; the Princes in another with governor and tutor and pages. They rattled out of Château Arnsdorf and along the Dresden road, clouded with dust, with the misty gold of the setting sun. Neitschütz had remained in respectful attitude on his own threshold until the coaches were out of sight; when he returned, heavily, to the hall, he found Madelon talking to Haverbeck by the stairs, thanking him for the gift he had brought from the Palais Royale.

"But Madame de Rosny says I am too young for fans."

Her father passed between youth and maiden.

"Everyone has gone now, Madelon. Go to bed. I'm tired—amusing fools. . . . Give me the diamonds."

The child put her tiny hand to her throat. "Can I not keep them? Are they not mine, now?"

"No, you are too young. Take them off."

"The best of all my gifts," sighed Madelon; she eyed her father coldly. "I never thought you meant to take them back—"

"Do as you are told. They are valuable."

With no further protest Madelon resigned the glittering string.

"Some day," said Haverbeck gently, "you will have many diamonds, Madelon."

Neitschütz glanced at him sharply.

"No doubt but she will. Go to bed, Madelon. You have had a pleasant day?"

"Yes, my father," she curtsied. "Good-night, Cousin!"

She approached Haverbeck; he would have saluted her hand, but she offered her cheek; as the youth kissed her, Neitschütz exclaimed harshly:

"What is this? Your hand was good enough for the Prince, eh?"

"Delphicus," smiled Madelon, "is my cousin."

"Well, well, take her away, madame, take her away."

Madelon tripped up the wide stone stairs, a gleam of lightness, of brightness; her candid laugh was heard when she was out of sight; the Frenchwoman, discreet, silent, followed her like a shadow.

Neitschütz turned a frowning scrutiny on the youth who remained as if waiting for some important event to take place.

"May I have five minutes of your time, sir?" asked Haverbeck.

"Not tonight. I'm fatigued—that tedious fool—how much more of it, eh? Count Stürm never came, you noticed that? No greetings, no message, no gift! A studied slight—you noticed it?"

"Yes. I must beg you to listen to me, sir; I leave early in the morning."

"What's this?" Neitschütz turned to stare down this impertinent insistence—five years ago he had dealt sharply with a boy; but Haverbeck was of his own height and his own arrogance now, and stared back; Neitschütz laughed roughly. "So you've grown up, eh? Well, come and say what you've got to say, but I can't help anyone, much as I can do to keep my own head above water."

"Sir, I am well aware of it."

Haverbeck followed his ungracious host into the little cabinet where, as a child, he had never been allowed to enter; it was off an antechamber with a small bedroom attached, and a private stair with a privy garden; then it was dark, for the small window looked to the east; grumbling, Neitschütz found the lintstock and lit the common thick candles on his bureau; their yellow light revealed that there was nothing of value in the cabinet; all was used, mean and scant; but, above the bureau, was a pretentious picture by an indifferent artist showing the two heirs of the House of Neitschütz in Roman draperies over plate armour, with their hands resting on plumed helmets and their handsome, but insipid, faces gazing at a huge coat of arms quartering Neitschütz, Diemen, Arnsdorf, Gaussig, and Schlaugwitz. On the flamboyant scrolled frame were their names in full: *Casimir Ulric Otto* and *Clement Philip Mathias.*

Neitschütz dropped with a groan into a great, wide, stout chair that easily accommodated his massive weight, loosened his stiff collar and cravat, and glanced at Haverbeck through the thick fluttering candle-light; that youth had already seated himself, a fact that the elder man had sourly noted but could not resent; Haverbeck was of the higher rank.

Neither spoke; the large hands of Neitschütz grasped the arms of his chair, his body relaxed, his chin sank on his breast; he gazed steadily at his guest.

And Haverbeck gazed at him and found little to admire.

Major General Rudolph von Neitschütz, Lord of Diemen, Arnsdorf, Gaussig and Schlaugwitz, descended from one of the most ancient families in the Empire, had a powerful, well-pro-

portioned frame; tall, heavy, he was yet erect and free from clumsiness; his features were good but harshly marked with lines of temper, gloom and bitterness; his face revealed that he was a disappointed man who had taken the betrayal of his hopes heavily; it revealed, too, that his intellect was superior to his character; an able, if cynic mind, a cool judgment, a keen purpose showed in those gold-brown eyes, but they were clouded with malice and shadowed by frowning shaggy brows; he disdained the perukes then becoming fashionable and his coarse brown hair, lined with grey, hung straight on to his powerful shoulders.

He suddenly turned from staring at Haverbeck, shot out a hand and pulled towards him a bottle that stood ready on the bureau.

"You drink ratafia now, eh?" He drew the glasses from among his papers and poured out the rum arrack. "You're back, eh? Why the devil didn't you stay in Paris? There is no opening here."

"And none in Paris that I cared to take."

"Fastidious! My God! What do you think you can do for yourself?"

"Everything."

"A crowing cock already! What have you got—a lieutenancy in the Life Guards?"

"Yes."

Nietschütz drank the rum arrack.

"Don't come to me. I'm burdened. Look at me! The boys are fools. What is it going to cost to push them on? Casimir will have vices he can't pay for; Clement has no stomach for soldiering, and that damned Stürm will baulk them at every turn."

"Perhaps I shall be able to help my cousins." Haverbeck spoke without ostentation as he spoke without faltering. Neitschütz regarded him with spiteful contempt.

"My God! What do *you* found your hopes on? Some trollop of a woman taking a fancy to your baby face and persuading her keeper or her wittol husband to pass you up?"

"No," replied Haverbeck, unperturbed by this brutality, "I prefer to choose my own women—and not because of their influence."

"You're cool. You've learnt something, eh? Let's look at you."

Neitschütz snatched up one of the candles and waved it across the person of his guest.

"Well-cut coat, good cloth, costly lace, a finer shirt than I could even afford—and how much a year?" he sneered. "You're spending above your means now—a body servant, too, in livery, and a handsome horse—don't come to me, my hands are full." He hated the young man who had never been afraid of him, or deferred to him—hated him because he was exactly as he would have wished his own sons to be, because Stürm praised him, because he was brilliant, beautiful and clever. Haverbeck did not flinch from the savage scrutiny, the waving light.

"I have not come to concern you in my promotion, sir. I can look after that. I shall be a Major-General by twenty-five—or dead."

At this mention of his own rank Neitschütz flamed. "And I'm no more at fifty! I laugh, my God, I laugh! A pranking boy! I thought better of your wits."

"Don't laugh, sir. I'm not a fool, I have even some ability and I've worked hard; my mother was of the House of Lüneburg; they have some influence."

The youth spoke coolly and this further angered Neitschütz.

"You're sly. I remember you. Getting up to try horses and wrestle with the grooms when my boys were abed; sitting up over your books with that worm-eaten scarecrow, Steffani, prying into everything—you had to excel, didn't you?—the best shot, the best fencer, Greek and Euclid, too—bah!"

Haverbeck kept his temper and without difficulty.

"I admit as much. As you remind me, I have my way to make —an orphan without a fortune."

"Do you think your accomplishments will help you—these days? With a man like Stürm in power? You don't impress

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me either—if you were in my regiment I would pass you over—too much a damned Adonis; find some blousy Venus to help you on."

Haverbeck faintly coloured, but kept his composure.

"There will be war—in a year or two, and my chance, *not,* sir, in your regiment."

"Eh?" Neitschütz banged down the candle, spluttering the wax over his thick hand. "War? You heard that? In Paris?"

"Yes."

"War—between whom?"

"France and the rest of the world. We shall fight with France. Stürm is decidedly in their interest."

"In their pay, you mean, a cursed venial wretch, a tricky, double-dealing liar!" The saturnine countenance of Neitschütz became more sombre, his fingers fidgeted on the arms of the chair, he jerked an eyebrow to glare at the youth. "What did you want with me, eh?"

"A little patience and some courtesy," replied Haverbeck, serenely. "Your temper, sir, is soured; that may be as great an obstacle to your progress as Count Stürm's intrigues."

"Your damned impertinence—" Neitschütz roared, checked himself, and snapped, "I always disliked you."

"I know, sir, I was never happy in your house . . . and I am sorry," Haverbeck spoke with sudden softness, almost tenderness, "for I am here to ask for the hand of your daughter, Magdalena Sibylla."

To Neitschütz this was the incredible; his coarse face quivered, his lips sneered, trembling on inadequate furies; the youth continued gently:

"Consider, sir, my offer. In a few years I shall be able to afford a wife and then Madelon will be marriageable—consider that I am your superior in birth, healthy, not a fool, not vicious, well educated and ambitious; consider, too, that I shall be content to waive the dowry you will find very difficult to provide for your daughter."

"Consider," stuttered Neitschütz, with clumsy sarcasm, "that

you are a penniless young braggart of a lieutenant whom I don't like, whom I don't believe in, and that I have other designs for my daughter—"

"The Elector's son?"

"No less. And, if you knew, where the devil did you find the infernal impudence to put yourself forward?"

"I thought you might, sir, see reason. Madelon will never marry the Electoral Prince."

Neitschütz writhed; this struck at a secret, horrid fear.

"It was as good as promised me today, the Elector—stupid as he is—sees the prize in Madelon, the Electress is agreeable, the boy already her slave—"

"And Count Stürm?"

"Blast Count Stürm!"

"Exactly. But he governs the Elector and he will never permit a marriage that will put you, his enemy, in power and be his own ruin."

"It would, it would," cried Neitschütz, pouring out another glass of rum arrack. "I'd have him in the Koenigsberg—he's bled the country white—how much do you think he made on the last army estimates?"

"Exactly the sum you would like to see in your own strong box, I suppose, sir."

Neitschütz raged into bitter laughter.

"You're a cunning young rogue. Perhaps you'll get on, after all, but Madelon is not for you—that girl has cost me two estates already. And worth it. A beauty—a wit—a mind—she'll govern Saxony."

Haverbeck rose.

"My suit is refused?"

"Definitely. She'll marry Johann Georg."

"No—but, even if she might—maybe I, some day, could do as much for her as any Elector of Saxony."

Haverbeck now spoke with some emotion; he sighed and looked with a distant pity, odd in one so young, at the heavy man who viewed him with such contemptuous hostility.

"Sir, you will never strike down this game, it flies too high. Stürm is clever—if you were to promise her to me—"

Neitschütz got clumsily to his feet.

"*You* fly too high. I warn you to be more moderate—Madelon! There'll be no one like her in the Empire."

"That is why I want her. But I see where your wish is set." Haverbeck suddenly spoke in hard tones. "And I warn you, Major-General von Neitschütz, your play is full of peril—this marriage will never be—take care, then, take care, I say."

"Of what, Baron de Haverbeck?"

"You know what I mean. Your lure is delicate and easily blown upon—"

Neitschütz fumbled in the skirts of his coat.

"Take your hand from your sword," smiled Haverbeck. "If your daughter's name is so dear to you send away Madame de Rosny."

"What do you know of Madame de Rosny?"

"Enough. She taints this house. I would not have her breathe on Madelon."

There was a passion in these last words, a pain and a sincerity that held Neitschütz silent in a second's flash of shame; Haverbeck passed him and was gone.

It was dark; small, carefully-placed lights disturbed the shadows in the hall and stairs; the door yet stood open on the empty courtyard; above the low walls of the stables showed the faint pure stars.

"Farewell to Arnsdorf," thought Haverbeck, sighing. "If ever I cross this groundsill again we shall all of us be changed indeed."

He was going in search of his body-servant when he observed an elegant carriage drive into the courtyard; as it drew up at the entrance the lantern showed the arms on the harness-cloth—those of Ferdinand, Count Stürm. Haverbeck paused in the door; as a lackey pealed the bell the occupant of the coach alighted—Count Stürm himself. Haverbeck knew him at once, but he did not recognize in the handsome young man who saluted him the beautiful boy he used to admire.

"I am Delphicus de Haverbeck, sir, immediately returned from Paris."

The minister was delighted.

"Baron de Haverbeck! Let me observe you! My friends have written about you from Versailles—in the Life Guards, eh?"

He studied the young man with approval. He was always keenly alert for talent and grace to attach to his party; quick and experienced as he was he saw success in Haverbeck as clearly as if it had been written on his brow—an uncommonly attractive presence, well-bred assurance, a steady glance, resolute lips—an asset to any party; with the women, invaluable.

"You are leaving for Dresden?" asked Count Stürm.

"Immediately."

"Arnsdorf impossible, eh?" The Minister lowered an already soft voice. "Between you and me, my dear Haverbeck, I think Neitschütz is not quite steady in his intellects—so morose, such a hatred for his fellows! Come back to Dresden with me—I shall be a few moments only. . . . Ah, my dear General, I throw myself on your mercy for this late visit!"

Disturbed by the bell, Neitschütz had come from his cabinet; he was dishevelled, his eyes flushed; he had difficulty in controlling his harsh voice; his repeated bows were ironic.

Count Stürm smiled; he seemed to be really amused; he was; for he thought of twenty years ago, when he had snatched from this man's cold wooing the sickly heiress who had left him half a million in rix-dollars, while Neitschütz had furiously stumbled into a marriage with a poor beauty who had left nothing (when his moods and his violences had chilled and withered her to death) but three expensive children. Count Stürm brought a small case from his pocket.

"My poor gift—and my desolation that I missed your Madelon's festival."

His compliments poured out smoothly; he could afford to be amiable, for, during all this long hatred, he had always been successful; he was also, naturally, an agreeable man—accomplished, vivacious and subtle; it cost him no effort to second the

mood of another, even with Neitschütz, his enemy, whom he really detested, his manner was smooth and soothing.

Stürm had a delicate appearance; he suffered, secretly, from ill health; his face was pale and sharp; he wore a fair frizzled peruke; he was fifty and below the middle height, bent slightly, too, above his cane.

He was to the last degree daring, resolute, hard and unscrupulous; for twenty years he had been absolute master in Saxony; bribes from all Europe had helped to swell his fortune; now he had been definitely bought by a yearly pension from France. Tormented, Neitschütz lowered before him, stammered over compliments, opened the case—a bracelet of black tourmalines, the most valuable present Magdalena Sibylla had received. . . . Neitschütz tried to smile, grinned, "A sombre gift for so young a girl!"

"The stones are rare, well-matched," Stürm civilly excused himself. "They show up the whiteness of the skin; perhaps in a few years, when your daughter comes to Dresden—"

"When my daughter comes to Dresden, she'll wear diamonds," he closed his lips on, "in a coronet." He was not master of himself; the vexation of the long homage to the Elector, the unexpected exasperation of the interview with Haverbeck, had shaken him; he would like to have thrown both his guests out of the door. Haverbeck saw his mood and did not wish to exacerbate it; he went to find his servant, to order his departure.

The enemies remained in the hall; Neitschütz made muttering offer of a rummer of Rhenish, the Minister refused all refreshment; he was pressed, he was invaded with work, only with difficulty had he been able to snatch a moment for this visit . . . if Arnsdorf had not been in the suburbs of Dresden. . . .

Neitschütz received in gloomy torment this onslaught of insolent civilities; he was thinking of the poverty of his house, the desperate state of his fortunes, the crudeness of his design to marry his daughter to the Electoral Prince—and how obvious all these were to the keen ironic mind of Ferdinand Stürm.

When Haverbeck returned to the hall the Minister offered

him a seat in his coach; when the youth accepted it seemed to Neitschütz that another had been added to his enemies; he made no comment on the sudden departure of Haverbeck.

Count Stürm sighed as he settled comfortably into the cushions of the *berline*. "A visit here is always disagreeable," and he warned Haverbeck of an invalid dog that occupied a warm place in the coach and whose smooth, fat whiteness could scarcely be perceived in the dusk.

But the young man had entered carefully, all his actions were marked by delicacy and precision; as the carriage swung to the Dresden road he asked:

"Will Neitschütz marry his daughter to the Electoral Prince?"

"Not while I live."

"Is it true that the boy is fascinated by her?"

"Yes—a wilful, unstable, untrained child. He will outgrow many such passions. They are children—wait five—eight years."

"What will Madelon be like in five, eight years?" questioned Haverbeck; he looked out of the coach window and the twilight landscape, vague beneath the sparkle of the stars, gave him an extraordinary pleasure; he felt a mounting ecstasy of happiness due to his own youth, the beauty of the world, and the movement of the coach taking him swiftly on the road towards his own fortune. . . .

Neitschütz remained in his ill-lit hall; he saw Haverbeck's servant and baggage depart; when the clatter of that had died away the house was very quiet; the first dry dead leaves blew in across the stone floor with a rustling whisper; the pellucid azure above the stables faded into darkness.

Neitschütz morosely fumbled with his thoughts of hate and tried to reduce them to some coherent design; his one hope, his one expectation, lay in that child upstairs, asleep now, with Madame de Rosny moving in her chamber, putting away the birthday gifts, the birthday crown, the birthday dress. . . . Never before had Neitschütz felt queasy on the subject of the governess; a swelling rancour rose in him against Haverbeck whose looks and words, bitterly recalled, made him feel queasy now.

When his daughter was married to Johann Georg, that perked-up, trim young coxcomb Haverbeck should feel the punishment of his effrontery.

A valet came to close the door; Neitschütz liked neither the fellow's faded livery nor the reminder in his unshaven, sullen face that his wages were overdue; as the bolts shot into place the Master of the House of Neitschütz retired to his gloomy, disordered cabinet, replenished the coarse candles, replenished the rum arrack in the thick glass, found his pipe, drank and smoked, sunken in his massive chair.

By a convenient door near the bureau Madame de Rosny entered; the formality of her russet gown had been discarded for a robe of pink sarcenet, the bosom open on abundant if mended laces; she was perfumed with orris root, the rouge under her eyes gave her face, in the candle-light, some lustre.

"Madelon behaved herself very well. I hope, Rudolph, you are pleased?"

Neitschütz pulled at his pipe without answering; piqued by his sullenness, the governess, who had lately had much to complain of, added:

"You will admit I have taught her something?"

Neitschütz replied rudely:

"Take care you don't teach her too much."

Françoise de Rosny thought at once, "That boy, he's brought tales, he disapproved!" She shrugged and pounced.

"Too late, Rudolph. Madelon is, and always will be, exactly what you and I have made her."

The heavy man, huddled in the heavy chair, the sombre shadow, felt the wound and grinned, a flicker of his flushed eyes returned the weary detestation in her tired gaze.

Madelon's festival was over.

ONE

Count Ferdinand Sturm sipped the medicine which his doctor measured out for him and when he had drunk it, gave a lollipop to a pampered monkey, which, belted and chained in carved silver, sat beside him on the table covered with a silk Persian carpet.

"Eh, Pug!" he smiled. "Good Pug, pleasant Pug!" for he liked to see the little animal indulge in the gross delights which did not interest him personally; although a sick man and nearly sixty years of age, Count Stürm had managed by incessant and watchful care to preserve all his mental and many of his physical activities.

Stürm knew exactly what he had to face; while the late Elector, his nominal master, had lived, it had not been too difficult for him to thwart all the frantic (and crude, Stürm thought) endeavours of General von Neitschütz to marry his daughter to the Electoral Prince. Easy, lazy, and relying entirely on his minister, who saved him all trouble and all disagreeableness, Johann Georg III, although he had promised his son's hand to Magdalena Sibylla von Neitschütz, yet had contrived to evade the fulfilment of the contract. . . . His sudden death from an unexpected apoplexy had altered the position. Count Stürm had to deal directly with the wayward lover, who had already petulantly announced his intention of an immediate marriage with the lady of his desire.

The Minister realized, not without humour, exactly what such a marriage would mean to him; he knew to the last degree the amount of hatred he had raised in the breast of General von Neitschütz; he knew that the girl who might be in the position of the arbiter of his destiny had inherited all this hatred;

he knew that she was aware of his long, steady efforts—both sly and open—to prevent her marriage with the Electoral Prince.

Sir William Colt, the English envoy (who had come with the excuse of the Garter for the new Elector, but really to win him for the Allies), Count von Spanheim, the Imperial resident, and Mynheer Heemskerke, the Dutch Republic's man, had already shown signs of paying some hesitant and dubious court to the House of Neitschütz in the hope that this marriage, so much discussed and disputed, might become one day an astonishing reality. . . . The Prince was very young, impetuous, desperately lost in love. . . .

Count Ferdinand Stürm therefore faced a life and death contest with the puissant powers of love and ambition; not only his own reputation and fortune and, possibly, his own liberty were in question, but the policy to which he had devoted all his entire life, all his labour and all his intelligence; he was not only influenced by the high pension which he received from King Louis, he sincerely believed in the cause of France. The best fortune that could happen to him, if he made peace with his triumphant enemies, would be to retire to a small estate and watch melons and peaches ripen, and argue with his gardener over the construction of glasshouses. This prospect did not appear seductive to him; a man of affairs, of action, he had enjoyed power for nearly thirty years, and he did not intend to relinquish it without the sharpest of struggles.

As he thoughtfully fed the glutted monkey with the brightly-coloured sweetmeats he considered his plans. He must move swiftly. The young man, who had been despatched on a hunting expedition at Moritzburg, was already restive and suspicious, he could not long by all the attractions of venery be kept from the bewitching girl; he had announced his intention of a visit to Château Arnsdorf. And, once the sly, unscrupulous tribe of them got him at Arnsdorf, Count Stürm was well aware of the danger of a sudden secret marriage; he was too wise a politician to undervalue his opponents; he knew the force and power of General von Neitschütz; he knew, more important,

the beauty and wit and intelligence of Magdalena Sibylla, and the hold she had upon the romantic, ignorant youth, the dominion over his senses and his intellects. Stürm knew the pride of the male members of that House of Neitschütz, their ancient birth which could compare not unfavourably with that of the Elector himself; knew their pretensions, their desperation, their boldness and greed; he would have to exert himself to defeat them. "Strike at your enemy's weakest point" had always been his maxim. Rudolph von Neitschütz's weakest point was his poverty; this kept him in a continual exasperated embarrassment; he had had the strength to affront this perpetual torment, but his sons had gone down easily into misfortune. Well, then, strike at him through the sons . . . worthless, reckless young rakehells; Casimir, at least, worthless, reckless, a scoundrel, without common prudence, knowing no restraint. . . .

Count Stürm drew out of his pocket the draft of a letter and the protocol of an agreement which had just been brought to him by his secretary. This demanded the hand of Eleanora Erdmuth Louise of Saxe-Eisenach, widow of Johann Frederic, Margrave of Anspach, for Johann Georg IV, Elector of Saxony—Arch Marshal of the Empire—a score of other honours! Count Stürm was scanning and approving these documents, fine finger tapping the arm of his chair, when the elegant door opened, and an elegant valet announced:

"Major-General Lüneburg de Haverbeck."

The minister greeted the soldier with tactful and gracious warmth; he entreated him to a seat, made humble excuses for breaking in upon his brief leisure. . . . He always maintained amiable, if not cordial, relations with the officer who, engaged in the war with the Porte on the confines of the Empire, had not seen very much of the minister; for even when the armies went into winter quarters Haverbeck had not spent all his leisure in Dresden. Count Stürm had neither impeded nor aided the soldier's career, which had been, owing to his own brilliant yet solid parts, his splendid gifts of character and intellect, singularly successful.

Major-General Delphicus Lüneburg de Haverbeck, of the Life Guards of the Elector of Saxony, commanding that Prince's troops in Hungary, affable, generous, handsome, was one of the most popular leaders in that large army of mixed nationalities, volunteers, mercenary and Imperial, who held back the Turk on the confines of Europe; easy and smiling, he waited for the old man to speak. Haverbeck was curious to know what business Count Stürm had with him in requesting this interview, yet watched with his usual patience while the minister smilingly played with the monkey who gambolled up and down the table and pulled at the Persian drapery. While still thus idly engaged Stürm asked the soldier if he was soon due to return to Vienna, or to the quarters of the Duke of Lorraine, or that of the Margrave of Baden-Baden. . . .

"I await the commands of the Elector," smiled Haverbeck. "I hear that his new policies are uncertain, and that he is not yet sure of sending his auxiliaries again to His Imperial Majesty."

"Like a child with a new toy," replied the minister, placidly, "His Electoral Highness is engaged in playing with several novel schemes."

"Politics," admitted the soldier, candidly, "do not interest me. I should be sorry, however, to grow rusty in barracks, and I hope, Count Stürm, you will be able to find some use for my sword, either in Hungary or Flanders."

"You must be well aware, my dear General, that it is impossible for me to send Saxony into the field, either against France or for France; I am entirely in the interest of His Most Christian Majesty, but I cannot openly assist him. As for you, your career is best pursued in the East."

"I should not care to fight against France," said Haverbeck, indifferently, "but I do not relish this delay in sending the Saxon contingent to Hungary."

"It will go, it will go," nodded the minister, soothingly, "but you must admit yourself, my dear General, that the roads are deucedly impassable, and that our new master is deucedly impossible—a wayward, petulant youth. . . . I have despatched him

to Moritzburg to cool his blood, hunting. I shall have my way with him, no doubt, but it will take time. He has been pampered, he is ill-trained, glutted with indolence and pleasure; yet I think there are in him some sparks of pride and enterprise. The campaign in Hungary under your tuition, my dear General, could be of considerable benefit to His Electoral Highness, could I but induce him to exert himself to that extent."

"It was not this matter," smiled Haverbeck, "that you wished to see me about?"

"No," replied the minister, "I wished to see you about the affair of the House of Neitschütz."

He paused on this name, but Haverbeck did not speak; leaning back in his chair, he played with the ends of his lace cravat and ribbons, and Count Stürm knew that it was useless to waste time on involved compliments or apologies; the soldier was, in his way, as shrewd, as alert, as he was himself.

"Forgive me, if I ask you, my dear Haverbeck, if you have any prospect or expectation of marrying the daughter of General von Neitschütz?"

"None," replied Haverbeck, drily. "As I daresay you are aware I have offered for the lady twice, and twice been definitely refused."

"I am glad for your sake," smiled Count Stürm, carefully putting his delicate finger-tips together. "She is to sight and ear delectable, and I would not decry one who has been your choice; but, believe me, she brings discomfiture for her admirers, there is bad blood in that House—I believe the lady to be like her father, hard, ambitious, and unscrupulous."

"They are my relations," commented Haverbeck, shortly.

"Eh, yes, but the connection is distant. I speak to you as one man of the world to another; it is useless, surely you will not affect to be unaware of what I daresay is the property of every street boy . . . *videlicet,* my position with regard to the House of Neitschütz in general and this lady in particular."

Haverbeck smiled, looked steadily at the speaker, and raised his dark, slanting brows.

"The young Elector is lost in love with Fräulein von Neitschütz, you mean, and will marry her, in spite of all your efforts, Count Stürm?"

"We shall see." The minister was smiling also. "They will make, of course, the most valiant and determined attempt; he is already pestered to go to Arnsdorf, and if they once get him there in his present mood, after three months apart from her, there will be a secret marriage, no doubt . . . the design is palpable enough."

"Can you prevent him going?" asked Haverbeck.

"No, I do not think I can, but perhaps I can put him into such a mood that his going there will not mean a marriage."

"I," said the young soldier, slightly troubled, "can have no part in this. The House of Neitschütz has declined my alliance and even my friendship. I have not been to Arnsdorf for eight years."

"I recall," nodded Stürm, "the day you and I left together, eh? Well, my dear General, I have never been able to do anything for you, you have never asked any favours, and maybe, never will; but *I* come to *you* now and ask a favour. Do you know anything of the affairs of your cousins—Captain Casimir and Captain Clement von Neitschütz?"

As Count Stürm made this request he carefully studied the agreeable, handsome face of the soldier, and he saw it harden; he therefore added immediately:

"I do not ask you—it goes without saying—to betray either a confidence or a relation."

"As I supposed," replied Haverbeck, drily. "I know nothing of these two young men, they have avoided me; I have been, as you know, so much abroad and am in another regiment and of another rank. You must be aware that they have little capacity and great extravagance."

"They are involved, I think," suggested Count Stürm, thoughtfully caressing the monkey, "with Fani von Ilten, eh?"

"It would be extraordinary if they were not," replied Haverbeck; "she has most of the idle young officers of the garrison

in her vile net. I sometimes wonder, my dear Count, that you do not lessen that harridan's activities."

"The good Baroness is extraordinarily useful to me," admitted the minister. "I obtain through her means information that it would be hopeless to endeavour to get hold of in any other way, and it is not in her power to ruin anybody but fools—and fools are of no use to themselves or to anyone else."

"I believe it probable that my cousins go to her infamous house, and gamble, and that they have borrowed money from her, but I know nothing."

"I can find that out for myself," said Count Stürm, patiently. "You have answered me, my dear General. I take it that you know nothing more and would not tell me, if you did."

"I should not feel obliged to do so," smiled Haverbeck. "I do not know your motives in these questions—which ring unpleasantly enough."

"I did not so intend them," the minister assured him gently. "I trust you will do me the honour to believe that I have been perfectly frank, and that I desire to be of some benefit to you. Cannot you see what I would propose?"

"No," declared Haverbeck, roundly.

"This, then: you tell me that you have offered twice—a fact that I already knew—for Magdalena Sibylla von Neitschütz. I may believe, therefore, that the lady has some value in your eyes?"

"You may," admitted Haverbeck, "believe as much."

"If she does not marry the Elector," added Count Stürm, quickly, "it would be likely, would it not, my dear General, that she might marry you, especially if I were to give another flourish to your career by securing you promotion—at twenty-eight, eh? You are worthy of it. Briefly, in every possible way help me to break off the affair with the Elector, and I will help you in every possible way to secure Fräulein von Neitschütz for yourself."

"How could I help you?" asked Haverbeck, sternly, leaning forward in his chair.

The answer came swiftly, as if it had been long prepared:

"Through those two flaunting young rakehells your cousins. . . . Find out from them what will disgust the Elector. No doubt they are in their sister's confidence, and she must have written to them. . . . Get hold of Fani von Ilten and discover from her the extent of their entanglement. Find me some evidence I can put before the Elector."

"Evidence as to what?" demanded Haverbeck, rising.

"Evidence as to the gross trap being laid for him. Perhaps," added Stürm, softly, "you have had some favour—some trifling letter or note, that might show where the lady's fancy lies . . . you take me?"

General de Haverbeck shook his handsome head slowly, smiling down at the shrunken figure of the minister beside the long table with the Persian cloth and the quick little monkey, and the sardian onyx bowl of sweetmeats.

"Nothing," he said, "nothing whatever. The lady has never marked me out for the least consideration . . . I know nothing, nothing whatever of the House of Neitschütz."

"You will not help me, then?"

"No, I am not a man of intrigue."

Count Stürm at this attitude showed discreet surprise.

"Not even to gain the lady to whom you have been so faithful? everyone comments, my dear General, that it is strange that you are not yet married."

"There are some things that no woman is worth," replied Haverbeck, indifferently; "I never had a fancy for that for which I had to stoop to pick up."

"You are not, then," smiled Count Stürm, "lost in love, as you termed the Elector?"

"By no means," agreed Haverbeck, affably.

The two men looked at each other with a certain curiosity that for a second overbore their common interest in what they spoke of; they were so different; the little statesman, shrivelled, bent, dainty and precise, with his nice airs and heartless smile, his sharp, unwholesome coloured face, tinged with the acids of

ill health, his immense, pale, frizzled peruke, and his handsome, formal clothes hanging limply on his wasted frame, was an odd, a pitiable, object in the eyes of the soldier; Delphicus de Haverbeck, who had eight years before attracted the jaded glance of Madame de Rosny as an extremely handsome youth, was now an extremely handsome man, set off by the parade of a fine uniform, and a generous, noble air, at once amiable and resolute; he gave the impression of one who had his own fortunes admirably in hand and would never ask license or favour from any. Stürm who had kept an easy but continuous watch on him, knew that he stood very well with the Emperor and his Generals, Lorraine, and Baden-Baden, and that he had acquitted himself with brilliant credit against the veteran troops of the Porte in that tedious, anxious, internecine warfare that tore and harried at the frontiers of the Empire.

"I suppose," remarked Stürm, seeming to huddle closer into his handsome clothes, "that you mean to do the best you possibly can for yourself?"

"I know of no one who would admit to less."

Stürm stroked his flaccid visage.

"You sent a Memorial to the Elector on the state of the Army."

"Uselessly. As I imagine."

"It has inflamed the young man to no purpose. Why excite him about what he knows nothing of? His father kept him silly —away from affairs—his idea of fighting is fisticuffs; indeed," added Stürm with an odd smile, "he is very innocent and simple for twenty-one."

"The late Prince was a good soldier," replied Haverbeck, with bold candour, "but lately suffered, under your influence and through a long peace, the Army to be decayed."

"Blame me. Yes, you are right. I do not intend war—why-for spend money on the Army?"

"The troops I have in Hungary," said Haverbeck, "were far from an honour to Saxony. Lorraine remarked it. To my confusion."

"But you have amended that, eh? I hear you have some admirable soldiers now."

"They have improved. But I cannot prevail against the corruption here. Marshal von Pollnitz is senile, and ruled by a rapacious woman."

"He has, however, one merit," put in Stürm, gently, "he is obedient to all I say."

"I know. Your man. So all is blocked. I have set out the abuses to the Elector, yet with slender expectation of reform. The Council of State is in your hands, too. And the fame of Saxony is cheapened, Count."

"Ah," smiled Stürm, not in the least nettled, "you listen to the chit-cats . . . the Army is adequate for a peace standing. The Elector won't heed your Memorial."

"It was a matter of conscience to send it."

"You were not thinking of your career as well as the fame of Saxony?" suggested Stürm, slyly.

"Certainly I was thinking of that. I do not care to be set back by the knavery of others, nor thwarted by the dishonest mischief of weaklings and imbecile traffickers in honours and profits."

Haverbeck spoke sternly with a rise of passion in his voice.

"Your tone is not ceremonious," protested Stürm, yet mildly and with insinuation in his voice, "but I have not invited ceremony. I know you are a man of inviolable honour and distinguished energy—vigilant and cautious—a little out of place in these times, but no doubt, General de Haverbeck, you will make your mark. The quickness of your perception will have enabled you to realize that this will scarcely be through me."

"Precisely," replied Haverbeck. "And you, sir, will be aware that I can be involved in no deception or stratagem that is intended on the House of Neitschütz."

The soldier took up his large gauntlets, his cane, and his braided cockaded hat; his pleasant manner verged on contempt. He departed with the least possible ceremony.

"Unshakable, useless," smiled Count Stürm, giving the monkey

his finger to bite. "He'll climb on his own path, unaided, eh, Pug?—and probably fall before he reaches the summit." The old man then struck a bell that brought his sombre, quiet secretary; Stürm handed him the letter with the marriage contract of the young Elector.

"Have those articles engrossed and sent off immediately. Have you the report from Strattmann about the brothers Neitschütz?"

"Yes, sir, it is ready for your perusal."

"He has watched them?"

"Yes, sir, and prepared a *dossier*."

"Very well, I will see Strattmann myself, and intimate to the Baroness von Ilten that I would like a personal interview—not here, I think, but at her own house. And now, hand me the green ledger."

The secretary unlocked a handsome cabinet in cinnabar lacquer, and brought out a thick book bound in green morocco which he put before his master. This contained a list, continually altered and brought up to date, of all the principal men in the Empire, of all the nobility who composed the court at Dresden, and of many of the considerable citizens of that city, together with the names of their wives or mistresses, and notes of the amount of influence these ladies were supposed to enjoy with their husbands or lovers. Count Stürm turned swiftly to the entry—*"Major-General Delphicus Secundus Hyacinthus Lüneburg de Haverbeck of the Life Guards—Commanding for the Elector in Hungary."* Against this was the note—"Angelica, or Angelique, an actress of the Italian Comedy (Carlotta Drexel, formerly a lace maker at Cassel). He has withdrawn her completely from the stage and keeps her in a small country-house outside Dresden on the Bächnitz Road. Though she appears faithful she has no influence with him whatever; she is very ignorant; she does not accompany him on his campaigns. There is one child aged about four years."

Count Stürm closed the green book and returned it to his secretary. He had learnt nothing that helped him; not be-

cause of any passion for another woman had Haverbeck declined to use the means suggested to obtain Magdalena Sibylla von Neitschütz, to whom however the minister continued to believe he was faithfully and deeply attached.

"Eh, well, Pug, we've done our best."

Convinced now that Haverbeck was of no use to him, Count Stürm put him out of his mind; he bore the handsome soldier no malice; he would prefer to have him for a friend rather than an enemy, for he believed that he would be very successful—possibly a great man.

"No doubt Saxony will be too small for his ambitions! but, eh, well, I'm ageing, by the time he is at his zenith my sun will have set, eh, Pug?"

The lean little man grinned, unfolded and read the report of Strattmann, one of his secret service agents, on the two young scions of the House of Neitschütz, the brothers of the dangerous Magdalena Sibylla. He found this very satisfactory. It should be easy to skilfully deal some fatal stroke at this most vulnerable spot; he reflected deliberately yet swiftly on time and circumstance, considered how long he could keep Johann Georg fretting at Moritzburg, how long Neitschütz would be likely to wait for him at Arnsdorf, the possibility of the girl being brought to Dresden, whether it would be wise to detain Haverbeck in Dresden, on the chance that he might again be brought face to face with Magdalena Sibylla von Neitschütz, or whether it would be the greater prudence to arrange for his return to Hungary. . . . Fani von Ilten, who was likely to supply the key to the whole scheme, must be seen at once.

Count Stürm had recently noted that this lady had lately taken into her establishment—the pleasanter name for which was a gambling hell—a woman by the name of Françoise de Rosny—a discredited French noblewoman, who had been for a number of years at Arnsdorf in the capacity of governess to Magdalena Sibylla. It was not to be supposed that she would feel much loyalty to her late employer; Stürm was certain she could be

bought, and almost certain that she would have matter worth the buying . . . this part of the game was apt to soil the fingers, he would move through it swiftly, fastidiously; it was not the first time that he had had to close his nostrils to the odour of the materials that he handled; he did not swerve from his purpose for any ugly details in the way.

Major-General de Haverbeck had left the Residenzschloss with some disturbance of his spirits. He had been aware of the methods of Count Stürm from the first time that he had been brought actually in touch with them. His life of the camp, though outwardly free and frank, had its undercurrent of intrigue and intrigue not too delicate or savoury; but Haverbeck had never mingled in underhand policies—what he could not take easily and boldly he had forgone. He was convinced in his own mind that Count Stürm was over-anxious, and that the Elector—infatuated as he might be—would never marry the penniless daughter of a ruined subject. He judged that young man to be too vain, too sensitive to ridicule, too mean to venture so great a throw. In brief, Haverbeck did not think well enough of Johann Georg to believe he would put through so princely an action as to marry the woman he loved in the face of the opposition of his ministers and the scorn of his fellow-princes; he thought therefore that the House of Neitschütz would be most hideously baulked of their long-anticipated fortune.

Returned to his own lodging, Haverbeck composed a letter in duplicate, not without some disgust at those to whom he wrote and an uncommon lack of harmony in his own spirits.

My Cousin,

I believe it is necessary to inform you that you would do well to be cautious in your dealings with the woman, Fani von Ilten, and in every way to beware of creating any scandal. I have no knowledge of your circumstance or fancies, but whatever they be I beg you to take this to heart, for your own as well as your

father and sister's sake. Believe me to be, my dear Cousin, your devoted, affectionate friend and cousin, Delphicus Lüneburg de Haverbeck.

He addressed these two epistles to Casimir and Clement, and sent them by his sergeant to the depot of the Cuirassiers, to which regiment the two brothers belonged. He was so ignorant of the affairs of the House of Neitschütz as not to guess that his warning came altogether too late, that it would prove of not the slightest significance, and be screwed up and tossed away as an impertinence by the young men he wished to save from a degradation to which they were already too deeply committed.

The spring day hung slackly on the spirits of Haverbeck when he had dispatched his epistles; the blue air about the city was for him empty of delight; he had been arrogantly menaced by Providence; his dearest desire seemed lost, she was withheld from him by all the force of vile, alarmed and powerful passions; and Stürm had allowed him to see that his career in Saxony was destitute of glorious opportunity; Pollnitz, the sick, corrupt ancient Chief of the Army, would retain his post, and he, Haverbeck, might waste in the Hungarian marshes, a General of Cavalry, and no more, indefinitely. Haverbeck did not abate his intentions of a better fortune than this, but he had the fortitude to do a hard thing for one of his temperament—wait, in idleness, on events.

TWO

"Oblige me," said Count Stürm, "as far as your convenience permits, and I shall not be troublesome either to you or your friends."

He warmed his hands before the large stove of dark amber-coloured glaze, which Fani von Ilten still kept alight in her small decorous inner parlour. Both the pale spring day and the blood of the minister were chilly. She knew him for an invalid and flattered his weakness; coffee in a service of painted gold was on the table. The neat room made no parade of luxury. In everything Fani von Ilten avoided ostentation. She was a woman of fifty with the remains of a beauty that had passed even more swiftly than her youth. Count Stürm, who knew a great deal about most people, did not know her complete history; he knew, however, sufficient to be able to judge the woman and her adventures. She did not offend his own easy good-humoured tolerance, although he did not desire a close acquaintance either with her person or with her activities; he found her, as a link with matters he could hardly touch directly, sometimes useful. Not only did Fani von Ilten keep a gambling club, which was one of the most fashionable in the capital, but she was both the lure and the bait for a firm of money-lenders; she also ran a secret trade in drugs, charms and philtres, in medicinal concoctions to preserve youth and beauty; to conceal disease and deformities, to revive exhausted energies; this woman, whose violent passions had early betrayed her into living a profligate and openly-scandalous life, had now the stillness of a spent-runner; her voice was low, her movements slow, her eyes veiled, her accent careful; her intellect, however, survived the total ruin of her character. She was shrewd, alert and prudent.

Making and serving the coffee with that niceness which she had always cultivated as one of the most useful of the minor arts, she ventured to ask Count Stürm, still close to the stove, slightly shivering even in his fur and velvet as he held out his shrivelled hands to the steady warmth of the square orange-red windows, what was his immediate need of her.

He knew, she was gratefully sure, that he could always count on her poor services . . . he knew also, she was equally sure, that she was aware that Strattmann, his agent, had been about her establishment making enquiries regarding the two Captains von Neitschütz— Was it of these gentlemen that His Excellency wished further information?

As she leant forward with her question Stürm regarded her with an expression of reserved hostility; he took out his spectacles, adjusted them, and continued to stare at her through the large glasses . . . he wondered who this woman really was and if she was more useful than perilous; a courtesan, a spy, certainly worse than either, probably an agent for usurers in Venice, the presiding deity of a gambling hell, a purveyor of drugs to the cunning, of charms to the simple, an extortionist of money by every possible means of intimidation, assiduous in the service of all the vices, with the manners and the apparel of a gentlewoman—tight bodice, high folded kerchief, apron, mittens and hair rolled under a stiff lace head-dress, all neat, sad, coloured, respectable—her ruined face fascinated Stürm—those whitish yellow cheeks, the sunken eyes, so quick and restless, the fleshy curved nose, and the mouth, so loosened that it appeared to have been distorted in a convulsion, yet held together in a resolute smile that continually widened over crooked, large and greyish teeth; as if conscious of the hideousness of this feature she had a habit of holding a handkerchief to her lips, but the delicate gesture and the fine fall of lace emphasized the cruel ugliness of that corroded mouth she endeavoured to hide.

The room was like the woman, sinister in its decorum, its tidiness, its blank rigid air; the straight curtains were well drawn over the tall windows, the exact chairs painted a dull pea green

were placed rigidly against the wall; in one corner was a screen, however, painted with coarse nude figures with lewd faces, who sprawled together on heavy clouds, and leered with red eyes across the hypocritical murk of the neat parlour. Stürm guessed that this screen came from some other apartment where Fani von Ilten entertained clients of another order than himself; he reflected with cool distaste that the blood would have to be hot and the brain dull indeed before any measure of sensuous enchantment could be obtained at the squalid shrine where Fani von Ilten evoked a frowsy Venus; he was grimly glad that his own one lust had always been the lust for power, and that neither the swine round Circe, nor the bones round the Sirens had ever been of his company.

Fani von Ilten, in her turn, saw in him, a little, dry, old man, peering between the frizzled manes of artificial hair, behind the spectacles, needing the glow of the stove to warm his thin blood, kept alive by doctors and infinite care and prolonged patience, a mere withered rind of a man, but one whom she could not entice or move by a jot, and one who might dispose of her and all her crew by a clap of his cold hands; she had been very, very careful to have agreeable news for him today; alert, quiet, with her abominable smile, she waited his pleasure.

Stürm put off his spectacles, gazed into the stove and spoke: "You know my situation—everyone knows it. The Neitschütz are hoping—are staking on this marriage with His Highness. I do not disguise it from you, indeed I could scarce disguise it from any that this silly youth is infatuated, has been encaged and caresses his bars, has been ensnared and adores the fowler—he is in a loud fluster of passion that will not hear reason. Now you know very well, my dear Baroness, what such a marriage would mean to me and, incidentally, to you. The mere fact that I have suffered you to remain in Dresden would be sufficient reason for the Neitschütz, when they were in power, to treat you with the strictest severity."

"How does Your Excellency think I can assist you?" asked

Fani von Ilten, whose practice it was never to disclose herself until the last possible occasion.

"Through these two young men—stupid profligates, as I take them to be. Strattmann reports they are frequently here, that they are in your debt and in considerable other difficulties. I believe, too, a certain Madame de Rosny is now of your company and that she at one time was governess in Arnsdorf. I can recall seeing her there. She appeared a judicious woman."

"I can," responded Fani von Ilten, dallying over her elegant cup, "tell you very little that you do not know already. You must be cognizant both of the character and upbringing of Fräulein von Neitschütz."

"I know," said the minister, drily, "that she has been educated from her earliest youth for coquetry and gallantry, and that her father has set before her this one ambition—to marry the Electoral Prince. Young and inexperienced as she is, I know her to be of uncommon parts, and I find in her features and in her expression something dangerous."

"She will need all her arts," smiled the Baroness, "for her father is ruined—you know that his finances are in a state of hopeless overthrow. You have contrived that he should neither aggrandize himself nor elevate his sons; consequently he has been thrown upon his own resources, and these were from the first but meagre."

"These two young gallants are deeply involved with you?" interrupted Count Stürm. "Their lewdness, I hear, has always scorned the censure of sober men."

"Like other officers stationed in Dresden," replied the lady demurely, with an odious leer, "they have come here to divert themselves in several fashions. They have also recently borrowed money. I have been enabled to lend them some thousands of rix-dollars."

"On what security?" demanded Stürm, his hands still hovering before the warmth of the stove.

"Their assurance that their sister was contracted to the Elector —made with many oaths and vehement assurances."

"Bah!—you took that?—from those desperate libertines?"

"I did," said Fani von Ilten, with a shrewd look, "and you know me well enough, I believe, Excellency, not to credit that I should be imprudent or hasty, eh? From what I can hear from Madame de Rosny, Fräulein von Neitschütz is an extraordinary creature, and a handsome young miss, and he an amorous youth—so it is quite possible that she *may* marry the Elector, and then, despite what you said just now, Count Stürm, about the downfall of your friends—among which I am honoured of course to be accounted—I think I shall stand very well with the House of Neitschütz."

"If," asked Count Stürm, quickly, "she does not marry the Elector, what then is your reward from these rambling sparks?"

"That comes from you," whispered Fani von Ilten, with a little atrocious simper. "One of these sprightly young men, Clement, is cautious, and not so mere a slave to his appetites, he cannot be made a bubble fool on every pleasing occasion. . . . Oh, I have tried . . . he is cool, sharp for his own advantage."

"Casimir, then?" suggested Stürm slyly.

"Ah, Casimir! There I have been successful—he is always in hot pursuit of every new fangle and must have her, as the moth must plunge into the candle—that boy is a mere drudge to his own vices. If he had had a swinging estate he would have lost it by now—as he has never had anything but his pay, you may suppose his beggarly condition."

"Yet you have suffered him here? Lent him money—supplied his entertainment?" questioned Stürm with a sneer. "And solely on the expectation that his sister would marry the Elector? Forgive me, my dear Baroness, but there is something more and give it me," he added sternly, "without further preamble."

But Fani von Ilten refused to be hurried in her cool narration of the wretched situation of Casimir von Neitschütz; she was enjoying the moment; her teeth showed; she forgot her handkerchief.

"When he continued to press on me the certainty of his sister's marriage with the Elector I asked for proof. 'I am a poor

woman,' I said, and he showed me one night last week letters from his father and sister. Drunk and frantic as he was, I could not, for a long while, induce him to leave these letters in my possession. . . ."

"Letters?" interrupted the minister, impatiently and delightedly. "Is it possible that he was so bereft of sense and judgment?"

Fani von Ilten raised her pencilled brows; no doubt Stürm found it difficult to credit the unbridled follies of licentious youth; but to her this was a common theme; she knew and used the fears and terrors which fall upon the lustful and the foolish.

"When Casimir von Neitschütz came to me for a further loan, not so many days ago, I demanded the retention of the letters he was continually showing me, and refused any further advances save on these conditions. Reckless, and, I think, pushed to an extremity, he brought me a packet that he had received that morning, and which, he said, he would redeem with the payment of all the capital—with interest—that I had lent him. These letters naturally remain in my close and guarded possession—they are worth a great deal of money. If I keep them secret it is quite possible that Fräulein von Neitschütz may marry the Elector."

"And if you sell them to me," said Count Stürm, at once seeing her drift, "I think it is quite likely that she will not do so. First, let me see the letters that I may judge of their value, then tell me the price of your cleverness and discretion."

"It will be a high one, practically the double of all that I have advanced to Captain von Neitschütz," and the lady coolly named a sum which startled even Count Stürm, who had been prepared to hear of fantastic extravagance.

"Why have you plunged so deep?" he asked, troubled, considering her and her odious guile and wondering if she was, even now, setting some springe for him; the lascivious figures on the screen vexed him, they seemed to mouth and leer.

"He could repay me if his sister were Electress," sneered

Fani von Ilten, "and from all that I hear it is likely enough that she will be the Electress. I take Madame de Rosny's judgment of the girl. I know Madame de Rosny, and how she trained her pupil—one to line her cabinets, and get her maintenance signed, and a round sum as well, was Madame de Rosny in her day!"

"Let me see the letters," demanded the minister, sharply, "they may not be worth any price."

He rose and came to the table, leaning on his cane.

"They are worth more than I have asked." The Baroness brought a packet from the pocket of her sober and decorous gown. "These are copies." She handed them across the table. "The originals are in careful security, as you may believe."

They bent towards each other, peering suspiciously into each other's blighted faces, her head-dress and his peruke touching; age plotting the ruin of youth.

While the minister, after fumbling out his spectacles again, read the letters which the Baroness had transcribed herself in a fair clear hand, that lady touched a bell, and, when the careful-faced servant appeared, asked the company of Madame de Rosny . . . for a few moments, on a matter of business, eh? "Have the goodness to make haste."

There were three letters. Count Stürm first read that which was signed *Johann Georg*.

My darling and my love,

I will not delay any longer in thanking you for all your civility. I humbly entreat you to accept my gratitude for the two letters you have sent me. I assure you they have made a profound impression on my heart, and that I am as grateful as I ought to be. . . .

This did not teach him any more of the Elector's character or circumstance, he knew already the young man's weakness and passion, his opinion of himself, Stürm, his desire for military glory, his gusts of pleasure in romantical fancies. . . .

"So she sent this to her brother, eh? She seems cool, designing and artful."

"A blockhead in love," smiled Fani von Ilten, withdrawing the copy of the Elector's letter. "She has him—I think—can she make her terms quick? For I take her to be but a summer fruit, not for long keeping, a light, bright, slight creature, easily blasted."

Stürm took no heed of these bitter words, nor the corroding smile that edged them; he was reading the other two letters, which were signed *"Madelon."*

Château Arnsdorf,
April 20th, 1692.

Casimir, my brother:

My father commands me to write to you. He is both troubled and angered by your demands for Money and your accounts of your difficulties. Believe me, we have nothing more to give you. We live ourselves in an economy which sometimes impinges on decency. We cannot afford to come to the Capital, and must remain here exposed to the insults of neighbours and the contempt of servants. Cease then, my brother, to lament to us of your embarrassments that you have brought on yourself by futile extravagances. Have patience, contrive to flatter and oblige the Elector, if it is possible; it is very certain that I shall marry him; then do not doubt that your attendance on the caprices of fortune will be rewarded beyond your merits. For it appears to me, my dear brother, that you have done little to deserve the favours that you so earnestly solicit. Meanwhile I am your affectionate and devoted sister,

Madelon.

The other letter which had enclosed the epistle of Johann Georg was written in a more hurried strain, and evidently under the press of passion; it appeared to have been penned impulsively, in the violence of some crisis, in the hurry of some strong emotion.

Château Arnsdorf,
April 30th, 1692.

My brother Casimir,

Do not continue to importune us. Have I not already made clear to you the desperation of our immediate circumstances. How can you doubt that I shall marry the Elector? Do you not know me and him? I have his oaths, his promises, his vows—what is he but a fond and silly youth, my inferior in mind, in education, in character? I send you his last letter. There are others more vehement. We continue to press him to visit Arnsdorf. It is certain he will come, and when he is here he will not leave it till we are married. Cease to harass us with your lamentations and complaints. Have I not also need of fortitude and patience? Burn this, even as you read it.

Your affectionate sister,
Madelon.

Both these letters were superscribed:

Captain Casimir von Neitschütz
from Magdalena Sibylla von Neitschütz his Sister,
writing from the Château at Arnsdorf, a suburb of Dresden, the month of April, 1692.

Fani von Ilten eyed the minister as he read the letters; his spectacles glittered blankly, but his sharp face retained its composure; Madelon's epistles were of inestimable value to him, but he did not choose that this harridan should know it. He was a prudent man, careful with money, and she had asked an immense sum. He detested her, steering before the wind, with a full sail, to hell—he wished her there, immediately, before he paid her. . . .

Madame de Rosny entered. She was housekeeper, mistress of the wardrobe, female doctor, matronly adviser, to the establishment run so successfully by Fani von Ilten. Her grey taffeta

rustled as she moved, she was neat, sombre, precise, keys at her waist, lawn at her bosom, she had felt slippers and an erect back; she had also an air of having retired from the world which had served her so shabbily and of communing in secret with inadequate devils. She knew Count Stürm at once and guessed his business. She was extremely interested in the affairs of the House of Neitschütz, and wished all evil to its present lord. Moistening her dry lips with her sharp-pointed tongue, she noted Casimir's letters on the table, indeed she was amused to see that the spoilt, petulant, dishonourable boy who had once been in her cynical charge had become a man so worthless and so reckless.

The minister, to gain time, and considering in his own mind how much the letters were really worth and how great were the chances that he could defeat the House of Neitschütz without them, began to talk to Madame de Rosny. They conversed together in low tones, these quiet, elderly people in the neat parlour. The stove light glowed cheerfully on the green panelling, the bright cafetiére was between them on the table, the room was cozy with an agreeable warmth; the pale sunshine could not penetrate here for the plain curtains were discreetly drawn. A yellow shade blurred the sharp features of these elderly people, their dark sober garments, their pale wrinkled hands; in the background the figures on the screen writhed and leered. Madame de Rosny required little encouragement to talk of her years spent at Arnsdorf. With light irony, from which she kept the essential bitterness, she sketched that miserable household, as she had seen it, the shivering half-imbecile pedant in the unwarmed library, the shabby rooms with the threadbare tapestry, the sham antiques, the ill-furnished damp kitchen, the grumbling servants, the stables empty, save for a jade or two and one fine horse for Madelon; the petty economies of the master of the house, his mended linen, refurbished uniform, patched boots, the mortgages, the loans, the visits from creditors, the heartless extravagance of the two vicious boys growing into two vicious men; Neitschütz, foul-mouthed and violent, storming and sombre by fits, sunk now into saturnine melancholy, drinking, scheming,

brooding, interested in nothing but Madelon, the increasing beauty, increasing wit, the spreading intelligence of Madelon.

"I," said Madame de Rosny, sweetly, "I have made something of the girl. I do not deny that she was born superior to most of her sex, but I have done a deal to polish her." She smiled in the depth of her hood and licked her dry lips, a little habit she had long possessed.

"Her face is very handsome," agreed Count Stürm, thoughtfully, "and her person very noble. She has great liveliness of spirit, and her repartee is ready and sparkling; she has, in brief, all the advantages that nature could give her. . . . I speak from what I have seen of her on the surface. At Dresden she has been very gay and very talkative, and put all those with whom she spoke in a good humour . . . entertained us all. I have heard her sing in Italian, and seen her dance a Polish dance; but you, madame, can judge better than I the character that is beneath all this."

"Believe me, she is dangerous," warned Madame de Rosny, her voice coming sharply, though she still smiled. "I have seen to it that she should be. She is far more than a pretty young woman likely to entangle a hasty and impetuous young man. Apart from the accomplishments and fancies that she learnt from me and the Maestro Steffani, she flourishes in art and wit and has some learning, a perfection in many languages, a richness of thought and a ripeness of judgment, which few ladies of her age could have as fair a pretension."

"Consider, sir," insinuated Fani von Ilten, thinking of the price she had put upon the letters, and the necessity of getting it, "that in Magdalena Sibylla von Neitschütz you do not deal with an ordinary person. She is both lovely and handsome, of good quality, of gentle breeding; a mind set for learning, of education peculiar, diligent, mathematics her passion. She has more than a sparkling of wit or moderate stock of knowledge; from the store of books she has read she has learnt much of men and the world and become a good critic, yet none of this in a pedantic fashion which might disgust a man."

"In painting, music, gardening, she has greater skill than most," put in Madame de Rosny, quietly; watchful, adroit, she regarded Stürm. "Her Latin and Greek are well enough, and as for womanly exercises, of sewing, pastry, confectioning, embroidering, preserving, the making of drugs, and for all household economies she is equal to any other lady of her degree, and I have taught her with this," smiled the ancient governess, "to be effectively humble with all her knowledge, extremely charitable towards the ignorant, timid with gentlemen, taught her to appear to know nothing of higher subjects than the welfare of acquaintances, the state of the weather, the gossip of friends, or the *Gazette—"*

"Taught her, I have no doubt," sneered Stürm, "every duplicity and hypocrisy, and it appears that she was well equipped to receive your good counsel."

"If," continued Madame de Rosny, unmoved by this, "she marries the Elector she will rule Saxony. She has a shrewd knowledge of European politics and she leans, as you may be aware, entirely to the other course from that you take."

"In short," said Fani von Ilten, who wished the bargain struck, "she has both the wit and the malice to ruin you, and will do it if you do not take your precautions."

The minister handed back the copies of the letters.

"And yet she had not the wit to stay her hand in writing these —exposing herself to this encumbered rake, her brother."

"She never," remarked Fani von Ilten, slowly, revealing her teeth, "could possibly have credited him with being quite such a reckless, headstrong lunatic as to show those letters to any, and she is, for all her art, but a girl, precisely protected—with not, my dear Excellency, our advantages of the knowledge of the ways of the town."

"She is not aware," agreed the minister ironically, "of such establishments as yours, Baroness, nor of the entanglements and temptations to which men like her brothers are subject."

And he pondered on Magdalena Sibylla von Neitschütz, brought up in the midst of corruption, yet herself uncorrupt;

trained and persuaded to dishonourable ends, but herself with her honour unsmirched; saved by her father's intense pride, by her ancient birth, from any vile taint or tarnish, pure and innocent herself, but being used callously as a piece in a gamester's cheating throw. More perilous, then, this Madelon, armed at once with innocency and guile, with all the weapons of truth and falsehood.

The two women, after a glance at each other, watched and waited in silence, wondering if he would pay, and what price, and if too much had been asked, or not enough.

Stürm considered his case as coolly as if he had been alone; he was conscious of the vile atmosphere of the neat, plain, shadowed room, of a certain miasma of evil that spread from the two decorous figures of the quiet women, but this did not influence him; nor was he stirred by any compassion for their victims, for the distress of Captain Casimir von Neitschütz, or the miserable position of his sister; Stürm was concerned in one question only: Would Johann Georg marry the girl if her devices to entrap him were not revealed?

If so the letters must be bought at any cost . . . difficult for him, old, invalidish, only conscious of his body when it ached or tormented him with exhaustion, to understand these sensuous golden follies, to imagine through what rosy glories, through what shimmering radiance, the maiden gleamed on the youth. . . . To what a desirable paradise she beckoned . . . difficult for one who has never been enchanted to do other than smile at the word enchantment.

The peril lay in their innocence; Johann Georg had been guarded by that early cherished romantic love as she by her father's care; he had never faltered in his loyalty to Madelon, which his mother, a stupid, dreamy Dane, had fostered; she had coddled him, kept him at her knee, told him high mounting legends of the North, seen Madelon as the destined, the desirable, bride . . . Stürm thought:

"I must not underrate it—a passion and a sentiment in one."

He had observed before the terrible force of a chaste passion,

when spirit joined with body in one yearning need; if the youth had been a libertine he had had more hopes, but pure love, deep-rooted, faithfully tended . . . it must be degraded before it could be destroyed.

The two voracious women saw calculation narrow the minister's mouth; Françoise de Rosny licked her lips, nodding, Fani von Ilten's handkerchief was pressing at her nostrils; she regretted that she would have to share the money with the ancient governess who had, however, done her part; Stürm turned his back on them and walked about; his wig and his spectacles concealed much of his face; he paused at the table.

He drank the cup of fresh coffee which Fani von Ilten had poured out for him and then again warmed his hands before the stove. The letters were worth the price she asked—worth any price. He took out his notebook and signed an agreement to pay the sum demanded.

Fani von Ilten accepted this without comment, and, rising, unlocked from a small cabinet on a table in the shadow of the screen, shrouded again by the shadows of the small high room, the three letters—that from the Elector, badly put together, carelessly written, ill spelt and those from Madelon, which were without fault, delicately penned and precisely composed.

As Count Stürm received them he smelt, even in this musty atmosphere, a faint perfume of clover, left by the bruised knot of melilot which Madelon had laid upon her letters when she had penned them, bent over her father's shabby bureau.

Madame de Rosny watched him with a chill triumph in her sunken eyes; as far as she was capable any longer of feeling any emotion she felt a pleasure in having contributed to the ruin of the House of Neitschütz. "The old man will shoot himself; the boys, bankrupt, go as ragged volunteers in the Imperial Army; the girl, she will probably marry Haverbeck—and lucky."

"Do not alarm Captain von Neitschütz," commanded Count Stürm, deliberately putting away the letters. "Never let any suspicion cross his mind that you are in correspondence with

me, or that his letters are less than safe. If it is necessary to keep him quiet, lend him more money."

"What will happen to the little Madelon?" smiled Fani von Ilten, smoothing her twisted mouth with the lace handkerchief. "I swear the child interests me."

Count Stürm thought, not without distaste: "I daresay she will become just such another as you." But he said:

"I believe she will marry General de Haverbeck. Does he ever come here?" added the minister drily.

Fani von Ilten shook her towering headdress.

"Never, and as for marrying a Neitschütz, he has no fortune—and is in debt."

"He is successful," corrected Stürm, as if that word comprised every desirable quality and every fortunate circumstance to which a man might attain.

Both the women laughed; there are so many degrees of success; the old man's remark seemed to them childish; nor did they like Haverbeck, if there had been many of his type in the world, women of their kind would have found it hard to make a living; they moved the screen and opened a side door which led into a larger room where the windows were half shuttered, half curtained and the air being close with scents of orris root, tonquin bean, tobacco and alcohol; there were several screened alcoves and tables set for cards; the stove was out, the doors of it open on choked rubbish of papers, tinsel, candle ends and trumpery; several girls and young women sat about in the half-obscured light; most had a faded and sullen air, untidy petticoats and unlaced bodices; one held her face as if in pain; one was painted like a doll baby, pink, white, black brows, crimson mouth; another, before a mirror which hung against the window, arranged black patches on a pimpled chin; they all turned to look at Stürm with dulled curiosity; one began to giggle, a pure-bred Saxon, still fresh, she had lovely blonde hair that she was twisting laboriously into curls.

"This is the better way out for your Excellency," smiled Ma-

dame de Rosny. "Gentlemen will soon be arriving to play—and your Excellency would not care to meet them?"

"A charming temple of pleasure," sneered Stürm, glancing round at the lazy, untidy and fatigued young women, "and these, no doubt, beauties by candle-light."

"Candles will soon be lit," returned Françoise de Rosny coolly.

"And every fool who can put the sweat of his tenants in his pockets will be here to be instructed in delight, eh?"

Stürm paused at the side door which was concealed behind a curtain of mohair and looked back into the room at the insolent votaries and reckless victims of the elegant amusements of Dresden; though they were all still and languid, he seemed to see them being hurried along with their own violence to an unappeasable tempest of darkness. He plucked at Fani von Ilten's sleeve; she was taller than he, and whispered in a curt tone of authority:

"Look you, madame. There is an alarm of witchcraft in Saxony—like a squib of wildfire; the Courts have several cases in hand. I could not, if I would, restrain the people. The Elector dreads it like all the hells."

"Maybe," murmured Madame de Rosny, "but still witchcraft is an invention of the ignorant."

Stürm poked a lean finger into her arm.

"Maybe," he mocked, "yet you know what I mean. It is but a word to cover filthy practices. You know them. They are dangerous. Even, my dear madame, to you."

Her face was blank in the shadow of her hood.

"I? I trade in other commodities."

"Keep to them. If you know anything of drugs, forget it. A woman died in the Koenigsberg the other day. On the rack."

"Bah!" Fani von Ilten broke in, with a livid glance. "We concoct a little medicine now and then—"

"Be careful how you flavour it. Avoid scandal. You deal with passionate fools. That's difficult." He shot a keen look from one to the other and was pleased to see how yellow and tumid with malice they showed.

"I'm determined against this sorcery," he added. "I will not have it, eh? A brisk trading woman like you should have no need—"

Fani von Ilten's hideous mouth frothed lightly at the corners as she wiped it, mumbling her answer behind the lace.

"If I knew any tricks of magic I'd not concern myself with these hussies and their keepers—"

"Nor relieve drunkards of their watches, or load the dice, or cadge for usurers, or sell me the letters of Fräulein von Neitschütz," interrupted Stürm, "in brief you would be a very honest woman, my dear Baroness."

The two women affected, with mutual cunning, to take this as a pleasantry; they laughed acidly, inwardly consoling themselves with the reflection that the horrid old ape was galled at parting with his money.

"Well," said Stürm, as if he too had his jest, "'tis an old saying that the harlot's house is the way to hell, so it is idle warning one so well on her road. But that I'll not have. No, madame, I'll not have it."

He slipped out of the door and peered up and down the small narrow street dim in the chill, long, grey spring dusk; the evil house looked blank and prim with blind windows and bleak façade, the neighbouring buildings were equally secretive, plain, screened; Stürm felt tired; he took a pinch of snuff and walked slowly, leaning on his cane; stupidly odd that one must deal with these boys and girls whose amours should be of no importance to a man like himself. At the corner of the street a plain chair was waiting; Stürm got in neatly and was carried immediately to the Residenzschloss; he hurried to his closet, and there completed his arrangements for the marriage of the Elector with the Margravine of Anspach, the selection of the proxy and the date of the ceremony. Then he read again those two clover-scented letters and the epistle signed "Johann Georg," after which he slowly locked them into a leather case which he put inside his coat next his withered bosom, and ordered his equipage to start early the next day for the Château Moritzburg, where the

young Elector, sullen, hesitant, between his minister and his love, was endeavouring to beguile a dismal leisure with dogs, horses and the hunt.

Stürm fondled the monkey, who surveyed him with grave consideration.

"This business is a confounded lot of trouble, eh, Pug?" sighed the old man. "Almost I'd give it up and let them have their head —how can I contend with them in the height of their youth and lust! And what is Saxony or ruling Saxony? No more of a gust, zest or relish to me than a nut or a lollipop or mess of curds to you, Pug! And yet to be put out of my place by a kick from that great, gross, vindictive beast, Neitschütz—"

The monkey leaped onto his knee and closed its cold, dry black fingers round his pale wrinkled hand and blinked up into his sunken disquieted face, shaded by the huge mass of the periwig. Stürm laughed.

"Are you telling me in a plain, impartial manner to go on with the game? Well, when I've had my drops and a night's rest I daresay I shall find it worth while again."

He took off his wig, pulled a silk cap out of his pocket and drew it over his bald head, then rang the bell sharply for his doctor, his body servant, the Paris and Holland *Gazettes*.

"Well," he remarked to the monkey who lurked on the chair to steal his supper. "Some philosophers have been glad to creep out of the world at any hole—but a man of my parts and figure must make a push for a less ignoble exit."

THREE

Ferdinand Sturm waited for the young Elector in his pleasant hunting-box at Moritzburg. Windows and doors stood open on the abundant leafage of May, on beds of peonies, bushes of lilac and white thorn. The room was austere, lofty, light, and bare, save for the heads of stags in stucco and in bronze, which hung at intervals round the walls; the plain furniture was fashioned of horn and chestnut.

Count Stürm paced up and down, leaning on his stick; he felt the relief of a man who has passed through a difficult period and is assured of success—and success not far off; yet he anticipated a tedious hour.

The young Prince came to this interview with equal reluctance; he remembered his minister always as a stern, implacable figure, behind a specious smoothness of tone and manner. The young Elector had resolved to be rid of his redoubtable minister, and yet knew that for some time he would not venture on such an extreme; the truth was that he had an indolent disposition and knew little of the arts of government; without Stürm he would have been lost in a maze of place-seekers and intriguers; there was no one to take the minister's place, no one of his international reputation, of his judgment, courage and unscrupulous daring.

Entering swiftly from the sunshine, Johann Georg greeted the minister with sullenness masked by civility, and with the half-surly intimation that he wished the interview to be short.

He had returned from hunting and was flushed with exercise and excitement. He was tall, heavy, comely, and would soon be stout; though, in his twenty-second year, his figure was well enough; he was not ill-looking, but the defect of his face was the flatness of his features, the fulness of his lips, the thickness of

his chin and neck. In compensation, however, for these defects the Elector was gifted with a pair of bright blue eyes, a fine, florid complexion, and a quantity of rich blond hair of uncommon brightness and profusion. He had been ill-educated and constantly indulged by an invalid, moody mother and an indifferent and sottish father; he concealed his ignorance, however, behind an air of breeding; in Stürm's belief his parts were not despicable, and he might be trained to energy, enterprise and industry.

He wore now a full dark green coat, heavily laced with gold, riding boots, and his brilliant hair in a buckle, and made a robust, gallant and handsome figure enough as he strode up and down the small, light, bright room, which was filled with the sunshine flowing through the thick golden-green beech boughs in from the narrow open windows without.

Indeed, Stürm, who with his invalidish air had taken one of the horn chairs and was resting with his hands crossed on his cane, considered impartially that this heir of the great House of Wettin had something splendid; a Danish mother and grandmother had emphasized the northern qualities of the Saxon stock; in his square, massive build, in his bright fairness, in his full-blooded colouring there was conveyed a sense of power, of a definite personality; not full grown yet, and clear of vice, he gave promise of gigantic stature and uncommon strength; his health was superb; though a gross eater, he was athletic, and neither slothful nor indulgent to himself; he liked the quiet life of a country gentleman, and was expert with horses, dogs, and gardens, was attracted towards agriculture and building; the foundations of his character were simple; when his appetites were appeased and his passions not aroused he would be good-natured, generous, and affectionate; but he was most sensitive as to his own defects, easily stirred to violence, jealous of superiority in others, particularly of his brother Frederic Augustus, who surpassed him in everything and whom he designed to send abroad on the first opportunity.

He was nettled now by the courteous silence of Stürm which he felt masked amusement.

"I am going," he announced, harshly, "immediately to Arnsdorf."

Count Stürm bowed over his cane.

"I shall not seek to impede the journey of your Highness."

"I am glad," returned the Elector, rudely. "I thought it was for that purpose that you came here, eh?"

"I am here, sir, for the purpose of preventing your marriage with the daughter of the House of Neitschütz."

At this the young man became turbulent, angry, almost violent, yet, as Stürm instantly noted, also uneasy. He assured the minister that he wasted his time and his breath, and that he was sorry he had undertaken the fatigue of the journey to Moritzburg on so futile an errand; his passion and pride alike dictated to him a hot resistance.

"I have promised her—we are contracted; her family is as ancient as mine; she is a paragon among women. I will hear nothing against it—nothing!"

He flung out these sentences as he strode up and down the pale, sunny floor.

Leaning against his cane, Stürm rubbed his hands together, and coughed, then sighed wearily at the tedious task which lay before him.

"This marriage is impossible; it will make your Highness ridiculous—not only in the Empire, but in Europe."

The angry young man did not immediately reply to this rebuke. He was sensible—it had often enough been put before him by widely-different people—that this marriage would likely make him laughable in the eyes of his contemporaries, and it was for that reason, and a certain shame and diffidence about his choice, that he had so far held back.

"Permit me," continued Stürm, with ironic deference, "to remind your Highness that you are very young, and that Fräulein von Neitschütz is not the only lady in the world who has a pretty presence and entrancing ways."

"I have decided to marry her; my own affairs are my own affairs and I will keep them within my own decision."

"Your father's wish, though, perhaps not definitely expressed, that you should marry the Margravine of Anspach, and I have ventured to undertake that negotiation."

"She is a widow, thirty years old," retorted the young Prince, furiously; "plain, they say, and quiet. I will not do it. I see what you are about, Count Stürm; you would strengthen the French interest in which you are so deep, binding me more closely to King Louis by this tiresome marriage! I," added the headstrong young man, petulantly, "prefer, if I must serve anybody, to serve the Emperor rather than the King of France. I am tired of hunting and Dresden and I should like to go into the field at the head of my own men—"

"His Imperial Majesty would most gratefully accept your Electoral Highness's services."

"Yes, fighting in the marshes in Hungary," retorted the Prince, rudely, "combating Turks and heathen—that is not my fancy—I wish to go to Flanders. All my interest and inclination are with the Allies. I intend to see Sir William Colt and Count von Spanheim when I return to Dresden."

Stürm grinned.

"I did not come here to discuss that—these points will no doubt come up at their proper turn. What I have to tell you concerns the House of Neitschütz, and the honour of your Highness."

"That will soon be one," retorted the excited young Prince, pausing before the minister and speaking not without dignity. "The lady will be within a few weeks, I hope, the Electress."

"It is impossible," smiled the minister, "that your Highness can so demean yourself. I must speak to you sharply and clearly. These people deceive you; Neitschütz is a man of broken fortunes, of unscrupulous and bitter temper, of no reputation. It is known to all that he has been angling for years for this marriage, inveigling your Highness from your childhood upwards."

At these words the young Prince flushed and moved away uneasily. He replied, however, quickly:

"That may be so—it is nothing to me."

"It surely should be something to your Highness, that this ruined adventurer will be put in charge of your affairs—he and his rakehelly sons who cannot rise above a captain's commission in the Cuirassiers . . ."

"I shall not advance the family," said the Elector, sullenly, "because I marry their daughter."

He did not himself like Major General von Neitschütz nor his two sons.

Stürm laughed; the words sounded like a futile defiance of an obvious fate.

"You underrate the lady's intelligence, her ambition, and her family affection," he remarked, drily. "Your Highness cannot marry Fräulein von Neitschütz and ignore her family. They will rule in Dresden, while I, no doubt, shall take my ease and make my reflections in the Koenigsberg."

"That is folly, Count," retorted the young man, hotly. "I will be ruled by no one, least of all by my wife. Madelon is meek and beautiful and will not think to cross my wishes."

"No?" remarked the Count, softly, with withered, pursed lips. "It may be as your Highness says, you have a better knowledge of the lady than I can pretend to. But this I do know—the foolish figure that you will cut by such a marriage. All your fellow princes will speak of you as a romantic boy, a simple youth, who has married his childhood's fancy."

The Elector was young enough to be stung by the sneers of this experienced man of the world, young enough to resent his own youth, and to be ashamed of his own generous impulses; but the lure and the thought of Madelon and a precious hidden dream of honour and joy were stronger even than these vexatious embarrassments; he scowled and frowned at Stürm, and added again:

"None of this makes any difference to me."

"The world is before you," urged Stürm, in a persuasive tone, "your Highness has seen nothing and been nowhere. You talk of war, of going abroad; that surely will come your way. You can choose then among many women—all of them I dare promise

your Highness as seductive as this little Saxon girl. Your marriage will be one of policy—fidelity is not asked of you. The Electress will know her place, she will not interfere either with your business or your pleasures; she will, however, preserve your dignity and your dynasty. She will not intrigue, she will not have hungry relations to disgrace your court, she will not shame and harass you with flaunting extravagant behaviour—"

"Neither will Madelon," exclaimed the Elector, startled into familiar speech. "What should make you think, sir, that Madelon would shame me?"

"Her character, her face, the manner in which she has been trained, the manner of woman she is, sir, the manner of woman she has been taught to be."

Stürm made a fine gesture towards the young man who stared at him with an angry and baffled expression.

"Forgive me, sir, for I must go beyond the point of delicacy. Are you sure you have a firm hold on this lady's affections? Are you convinced that, young as she is, she has not already cast her eye on some other man?"

A name sprang at once to the Elector's mind, it was with difficulty he kept it from his lips—General de Haverbeck.

The minister did not scruple to speak that name.

"The lady has been, when in Dresden, very familiar with her cousin, General de Haverbeck; he is something of her cast of mind and something of her stern ambition—they are both bold and handsome and intelligent."

Stürm spoke these words as if to imply that the Elector had none of these qualities.

"I believe they understand each other; it is known that he has twice asked for her hand, only lack of fortune stands between them. Take care, sir, it is not because you do not lack fortune that you have found such grace with the lady."

"Haverbeck," frowned the Elector, sullenly, "I never liked. Send him back to Hungary, let him attach himself to the Imperial Court; I do not want him in Dresden. She has never spoken of him to me . . . she warned me of you . . . she told

me she knew you would do all you could to poison me against her. . . ."

"Ah," thought Stürm, "as clever as that—I might have known."

Earnestly and with force he said aloud:

"I do entreat your Highness to forgo this lady, I will not conceal from you that her family being so ancient, her father, with all his faults, having so high a pride, you can never have her if you do not marry her, but such a marriage would be fatal—not only to yourself, but to Saxony."

The Elector was moved, exasperated, and troubled. He walked up and down the sunny floor, his hands clasped behind his full coat skirts. He pulled with his short white teeth at his full underlip, his wide nostrils distended, and the blood showed in his hot blue eyes. But he did not give way, and Stürm secretly respected him for the defiance he made and his fierce resistance to all worldly argument and consideration; Stürm had scarcely expected so stern a front.

Not without a certain pity for a bold youth exalted by his first passion did the minister bring the three letters from the inner pocket of his coat; this was almost as unpleasant as the interview with the two women the other day; he already felt exhausted.

"Captain Casimir von Neitschütz," he explained, deliberately, "has been lately in considerable difficulties. In his embarrassment he turned to a certain woman, a Baroness Fani von Ilten, who acts as a moneylender's agent. When desperately pressed he tried to negotiate a further loan, and she asked for some guarantee, and he gave her these."

Count Stürm did not hold out the letters, but kept them above his cane and looked on the floor.

The Elector paused in his striding and stared—first at the three papers, and then at Stürm's narrow, pale and impassive face shadowed by the frizzled wig.

"Captain Casimir von Neitschütz and his brother, Captain Clement, and their father have repeatedly said and boasted and spread it up and down that the daughter is to marry your Electoral Highness. On this assertion they have borrowed money,

evaded debts, and put on an arrogant pride which has rendered them intolerable to their neighbours and companions. Fani von Ilten, however, is a shrewd hand at many games; mere words were not enough for her. Captain von Neitschütz, upon pressure, had the incredible effrontery and the extraordinary impudence to give her these letters, which I now, with pain, hand to your Highness."

The Elector snatched and read Madelon's first letter, round which still clung that faint scent of honey-clover, the fading knot of melilot on her desk.

"There is nothing in this," he said, hoarsely. "It is only as she might express herself to a brother who had been harrowing and tormenting her."

He spoke uneasily, even without conviction, and even as the words left his lips, his eyes darkening behind the thick pale lashes, he fell to the second letter—his own—the clumsy, ill-expressed love-letter, written with all his deep sincerity and simple passion.

"How did this come into the possession of the woman you speak of?" he demanded, towering over the shrinking figure of the minister.

"It was given her, as I have explained," muttered Stürm, "by Captain Casimir von Neitschütz—it came to him from his sister, in the third letter which I must entreat your Highness to read."

Stürm coughed nervously behind his hand; the room, though so airy, seemed oppressive; he hated those dark masks of stags with sharp horns, disliked even the sunlight, broken by the shadow of the beech leaves beyond the window; he looked no higher than the strong, well-shaped hands of Johann Georg, holding the three letters; he marked the twist of the braiding on the deep cuffs, the fall of the lace round the strong wrists; two of the letters fluttered to the ground.

Stürm had countersigned many a death warrant, but had never so definitely felt he was slaying something as he felt now; not the body but the soul of a human being was he destroying; in killing this pure and exalted love he felt, cynic as he was, that

he was doing a frightful action . . . a strange sensation! He wiped his forehead and turned aside his head so as not to gaze at the young man as he read those words which must pull down many a rapturous expectation. . . .

Stürm tried to think of the peace of nature . . . the park was very fair outside the window, the sunshine very serene in the green leaves of the beech trees, the pleasant glades opening to a violet horizon; it was very fair without . . . this was a boy's early love, nothing serious, after all; he would forget. . . .

Johann Georg read Madelon's letter through twice.

Château Arnsdorf,
April 30th, 1692.

My brother Casimir,

Do not continue to importune us. Have I not already made clear to you the desperation of our immediate circumstances? How can you doubt that I shall marry the Elector? Do you not know me and him? I have his oaths, his promises, his vows—what is he but a fond and silly youth, my inferior in mind, in education and character? I send you his last letter. There are others more vehement. We continue to press him to visit Arnsdorf, it is certain he will come, and when he is here he will not leave it till we are married. Cease to harass us with your lamentations and complaints. Have I not also need of fortitude and patience? Burn this, even as you read it.

Your affectionate sister,
Madelon.

The first bitter and desperate emotion he had ever known in all his spoiled and easy life overwhelmed the youth as he read. He showed great self-control. He examined the letter to be certain that it was not forged or copied. He took two or three others, worn from being perpetually in a case next his heart, from his pocket, and compared them, and satisfied himself that this was Madelon's hand, nay, it was more than Madelon's hand, it was Madelon's heart, and Madelon's soul. . . .

Count Stürm turned, biting his finger and, with lowered head, yet contrived to glance at the Elector.

"This boy will make a man," he thought, with approval.

Johann Georg did not rage or storm, did not threaten or lament. He put up the letters, and paced to and fro the sunny, light, faintly shadowed floor in silence, his hands again clasped behind the heavy skirts of his green, laced coat.

Stürm noticed that his young face had a contorted, almost a bruised, look. His blood appeared to have congested with shock, and Stürm, remembering how his father had died, feared that he might fall into a fit or seizure.

"I am sorry I had to go to such extremes," he muttered, with regret for his brutal action; "it was better that your Highness should see those letters now—than afterwards."

Johann Georg halted and made one or two efforts to speak. His thick lips and gold eyebrows twitched.

"How did you get to know of this?" he stammered, at last, in thick unnatural tones.

To give him time to recover that composure for which he was so valiantly striving, Stürm made many words of his answer.

"I have had, in the interests of your Highness, these two young Neitschütz watched; I have known of their difficulties and the company they keep, the way they were using your name and that of their sister to help themselves. I have tracked them to the establishment kept by this woman, and had them watched there by a spy of mine, one Strattmann. Well, as your Highness will guess, I got hold of the woman, and bought the letters. I could hardly have credited that they would have been so dishonourable and imprudent, but this Casimir is a profligate fool—"

"She has been laughing at me," whispered Johann Georg, as if that was the heart of all the horror for him. "She has been amusing herself, eh?"

"She meant it to be a profitable amusement."

He deliberately and carefully, despite his cool pity, added one more stab at the lacerated heart of Johann Georg.

"I have heard it stated by these same rascal brothers that she has a strong fancy for General de Haverbeck, and that once she were Electress, he would not spend much time in Hungary. . . ."

"Ah," cried the Elector, on a heavy sigh.

"These women," urged Stürm, "are like that, sir; as you grow older, you will know it."

At this flick at his youthfulness and folly the anguish of the young man became intolerable; he put the back of his hand to his face with a childish gesture. Yet, to the admiration of the minister, he contrived to bear himself bravely.

"Leave it to me," he whispered, "I will deal with it. You may tell Colt and Spanheim that I will not meet them. As for the marriage with the Margravine, put it through, I suppose, I'll sign your contract . . . send off your proxies, eh, why not? I should thank you, but that must be later . . . I'll see that woman, Fräu von Ilten . . . I'd like to hear . . . for myself."

His love, his first love, the love that he was lost in . . .

Stürm pitied him, and tried to remember some far-off day when he might have been hurt through a woman; indeed, he could remember none such; yet his subtle understanding of the human mind and the human heart made him capable of sympathizing now with the youth he had tormented.

"Absolve me, sir," he sighed, quietly, "from doing this for my own purpose; it was for Saxony and your Highness, too. These vultures and harpies that crowd round the courts of Princes need someone like myself to keep them away, sir."

Johann Georg did not hear; his shocked mind was going back over the years of his long knowledge of Madelon—all her ways, her smiles, and talks, and companionship, her sympathy, her interest, her understanding—all false, all assumed, for the mean end of ambition . . . Now his strained heart urged him to swift and desperate conclusions; he saw her as completely false and vile; yet he had not plumbed the depth of his pain, he was but on the verge of uncomprehended miseries.

"Am I not his superior in everything?" So she knew that, she who had so adroitly endeavoured to raise him in his own es-

teem. He fumbled at the folds of lawn round his neck; Stürm, who knew him to be so petulant, so violent, was amazed by the courage with which he took this blow.

She had laughed at him, he thought, with bitter torment, with her brothers, with Delphicus de Haverbeck, who, on every count, excelled him . . . Stürm had just said she was talked of with Haverbeck . . . she had been revealed so sharply, as so detestable, that he could believe anything of her; still with his fingers in his cravat he glared down at Stürm.

"Has Haverbeck been her lover?" he asked, hotly.

"Her lover." Stürm was surprised by this. He did not know, he had the worst opinion of the woman, her father and her brothers; yet he had not thought of this, but the youth's jealousy might be well founded.

He knew Haverbeck loved her . . . it was odd that he had evaded the marriage when put within his grasp, perhaps because no marriage was needed?

Stürm did not know; but it suited him that the Elector should think vilely of Madelon von Neitschütz.

"Possibly, she has an ardent temperament, and he has been successful with the women and in the field . . . I suppose they would be very attractive to each other."

The Elector shuddered; he put away the three letters with the others and fastened his pocket-flap over them. He pulled open the folds of lace and muslin on his throat; but it was not this that choked him, that made him feel all air was denied him, and that a weight lay on his heart, restricting its beating.

"Get forward my marriage with the Margravine," he muttered. "As for me, I shall go to Arnsdorf—they are expecting me."

"After this, sir, you will go to Arnsdorf?"

"Yes."

"Because you must see her again?" exclaimed Stürm, disappointed, alarmed.

"I do not know," muttered Johann Georg, thickly. "They must be punished. This cannot pass. I'll see that woman. Who sold the letters. I want to hear—more."

"You will but torment yourself, sir," protested Stürm, but not ill pleased; the youth would, he knew, hear from those two hell-cats what would inflame him to fury against the House of Neitschütz.

"I'll go to Arnsdorf." Johann Georg, so young, so brave, struggled on with his sentences. "I'll tell them myself what I have found out."

Stürm reflected, sharply, that this would be well enough, this visit would be their final defeat, his final release. The old man rose, discreetly, wearily, thinking with relief of the ease of his carriage and the quiet of the seven miles' drive to Dresden.

Johann Georg did not observe his departure, nor hear his leave-taking; he remained standing in the light, sunny room, rapt in his pain, heavy, splendid, still; there was a taste like verjuice in his mouth; far away, dim, there eluded him the fairy shape of a delicate girl who admired, who loved, him; far away and soon lost completely; slurred by darknesses of gross perjury, of sly treachery, of foul, sneering plots, of grinning, lascivious intrigues.

FOUR

Major General de Haverbeck, after parading and reviewing the troops, returned to the military dépôt of the Life Guards in the Neustadt and took from his pocket the last number of the *Gazette;* his disinterested glance was arrested by the mention of a trial for witchcraft which had been in some way concerning the public mind, and a notice that the accused woman had died under torture in the Koenigsberg. Haverbeck had always had a peculiar detestation of the dark outline, the sombre bulk of the huge State prison; he reflected with distaste on a woman dying there in the inner, dark torture chamber. He impatiently turned over the news-letter. As he did so he saw an announcement of the approaching marriage of the Johann Georg IV, Elector of Saxony, Arch Marshal of the Empire, with Her Highness Ermuthe Louise of Saxe-Eisenach, widow of the late Margrave of Anspach. It stated that His Highness's proxy, the Duke of Croy, had already left Dresden to marry and bring home the bride. Haverbeck folded the *Gazette* into the pocket of his uniform and went directly to the Residenzschloss.

The clean handsome streets were pleasant in the warm morning air, the waters of the Elbe blue beneath the bluer sky. On many balconies were flowers, on many roofs and towers were flags; there was an atmosphere of gaiety and lightness abroad, not only because of the summer, but because there was lately a young ruler returned to his capital; after the necessary and dutiful period of mourning for a prince who had been respected but was not popular, the people were pleased with their new Elector —because of his youth, his comely appearance, his apparent good nature, his spirits and gallantry he was approved; he was reputed to be both enterprising and lively and his subjects cared very little that he was also obstinate and ignorant.

Haverbeck found the Residenzschloss busy with animated activity, the state rooms were being hastily replenished in the way of furniture and fitments, tapestries and pictures being brought out of attics and presses. Whereas the late Elector had been a careful man indifferent to all forms of display, the present prince was magnificent in his tastes and wishful to make on every possible occasion a show of splendour; on every lip Haverbeck heard confirmation of the marriage arranged between the Elector and the Margravine of Anspach; he also heard that His Highness was leaving that evening for Arnsdorf.

Haverbeck was baffled. Why should the Elector go to the house of the Neitschütz, and expose himself to the reproaches, the seduction, the despair of Magdalena Sibylla? He was good-natured, tolerant and easy. Why then should he desire to go and gloat over the spectacle of the miserable downfallen House of Neitschütz? Why expose and emphasize, as it were, his own dishonour? For Haverbeck knew of his oaths and promises to Madelon, and of the contract that existed between them.

Probably, thought the soldier, he is struggling with Stürm, who has put this announcement and arranged this marriage without his consent—his visit to Arnsdorf will be in the nature of a flight, an escape; perhaps he will marry her, secretly, and flout them all. I wonder if he has so much courage. . . . If he has it is odd that he should be persuaded to this public promise to another woman which will cause infinite scandal, possibly a war.

Haverbeck knew that he missed the key to the situation—some important, vital fact that would make all clear . . . convinced that he was wasting time and always detesting inaction, he decided to demand an audience with the Elector under the excuse of desiring an answer to his memorial on the army, which had been sent him some months ago on the death of the former Prince. He waited, therefore, until the departure of the Marquis de Rébénec, the French Resident who had been closeted with the Elector, then sent in his name with a petition to be received.

He met with an instant refusal.

This rebuff made Haverbeck more determined. He took up his place near to the Elector's closet-door, and waited there, patient as a sentinel.

"If I can see him, it will tell me much—for he is but a wilful and uncontrolled boy."

A graceful clock in silver-porcelain that stood on an ormolu cabinet between the blue velvet curtains of the tall windows had marked off half an hour more of the day before the Elector appeared; he was flushed and dishevelled, his cravat carelessly knotted, his thick fair hair ruffled, his eyes oddly swollen, as if he lacked sleep or had been weeping; he recognized instantly and with flaming annoyance Haverbeck, and paused with a harsh demand—as to his business?

Haverbeck, coolly studying him, stated this with extreme respect, taking as many words as possible that he might have the longer for his careful consideration of the Elector.

Johann Georg answered with rude hostility:

"What is all this to me? I have not read your memorial, General de Haverbeck. I have received no such complaint from other of my officers."

"Yet the facts are very well known, Sir," replied the young General patiently, "for I have written of them in all my letters —I have even cited particular examples, and I have foretold what must occur in the army of your Highness if the defaulters are not more rigorously punished."

"I know nothing of it," replied the Elector sullenly, staring at Haverbeck as if he scarcely heard what that gentleman said, yet was intensely concerned with his personality.

Haverbeck felt this; he was aware that the Elector was looking at him with a hostility, with a passionate interest, that he had never discovered before. He knew that Johann Georg had never liked him, but there had been a certain indifference mingled with his dislike; now there was active antagonism.

He continued to talk about the state of the army, he mentioned that there was neither artillery disposable nor remounts

for the cavalry, nor regular pay, nor rations for the soldiers, that order and discipline were impossible and defeat almost unavoidable; in brief, that the Saxon troops had been the most disgraceful among those assisting the Emperor in Hungary.

"This state of affairs," he added, "has been supported or even connived at by the court."

"Let Stürm attend to this," said the Elector, quickly, heavily.

Haverbeck replied:

"Your Highness knows perfectly well that Stürm has no interest in the army—nor has Marshal Pollnitz, his creature."

"What interest have you," demanded Johann Georg, harshly, "in making these complaints to me? You take an intolerable tone, General de Haverbeck!"

"I find myself, your Highness, in an intolerable position. You ask what interest I have.—None. I speak to you for your own service. *You* lose by these basenesses and confusion—not *I*. It is open to me to leave a service in which I find but little satisfaction or honour. For my own particular part I certainly shall not care much longer to force myself to live with people who are nearly always intoxicated, given up to their vices and their corruption, and where I expose myself to the risk of losing for life both my reputation and my honour."

The Elector sighed heavily with vexation.

"Why do you force all this on me, now, General de Haverbeck?" he demanded. "I have many concerns on my shoulders."

"But hardly one more important than this," replied the young General, coolly. "However, as your Highness does not wish to hear me, I do not wish to speak."

"Take your complaint," said the Elector, "to Field Marshal von Pollnitz, who is the Chief of my army."

Haverbeck smiled. Pollnitz was old, feeble, corrupt, and an unscrupulous tool of Count Stürm. Such a recommendation was almost an insult. He stepped back and it was more as if he dismissed the Elector than the Elector dismissed him.

As Johann Georg, hesitant, angry, distracted, turned away Haverbeck asked clearly:

"Does Your Highness go to Arnsdorf this evening?"

Johann Georg flung round and flashed fury at him; he was as surprised as maddened by the question.

"This insolence will be remembered, General de Haverbeck," he declared hotly.

"I am answered, Your Highness," replied Haverbeck, indifferent to the menace, absorbed in his own peculiar problem. He had not yet obtained the key to the situation. Johann Georg was agitated, infuriated, seemed absorbed in some inner tumult, torn with emotion, not in the least like a boy lost in his first love—as Count Stürm had described him—not in the least like a man going to his mistress with the intention of a secret marriage neither elated, nor enthusiastic, nor triumphant, nor complacently acquiescing in the designs of another; rather, Haverbeck read him, as a man in a mood of hatred, full of malice and tumult, and that was odd indeed in one of such renown for good nature and easy ways.

"What has occurred? Something at which I cannot guess or glimpse," thought Haverbeck, with his handsome dark face clouded and his black brows gathered in a frown.

He left the Residenzschloss hastily. It occurred to him that he might discover something from Madelon's brothers. He sent a messenger to the young officers' several lodgings to enquire of them. By this means he discovered that both Clement and Casimir had gone early that morning to Arnsdorf. Haverbeck thought this definitely indicated that the visit of the Elector was expected and that all the members of the House of Neitschütz were to be gathered together to meet him and force him into a certain course of action—the secret marriage, no doubt.

"They intend to put this through in spite of Stürm, or possibly they do not know of the contract with the Margravine of Anspach; they may have left Dresden before the *Gazette* was out."

All these circumstances fitted well enough together into a coherent whole. But what of the demeanour of the young

Elector? Why was he so perturbed—appeared to be so wretched, breathing hate instead of love? Haverbeck recalled, with a smile at the recollection, a youthful vow never to enter the Château of Arnsdorf again; he had not since that time received such treatment from the members of the House of Neitschütz as should make him wish to rescind that resolution. Whether or no they were expecting the Elector at Arnsdorf, Haverbeck knew that *he* would be an unwelcome guest, and he hesitated for a moment, considering how difficult it would be to endure the fantastic rudeness of the harsh and bitter old man, and the flippant insolence of the foolish and vicious young men.

If he left Dresden at once he could reach Arnsdorf some hours before the Elector. It was a last chance to obtain something that he had persistently wanted all his life, and he was not a man to lightly forgo a desire.

He was mounting at his door when an old man stepped from a hired carriage and hurried through the passing crowd to his side.

"Ah, Steffani!" Haverbeck was surprised. "I am sorry you were not here earlier; I am leaving Dresden for a while."

The old Italian's sallow face quivered with disappointment, even with apprehension.

"Monseigneur, I have come to entreat you to return with me, and immediately."

"Impossible," smiled Haverbeck, mounting. "Tomorrow, my dear Maestro, tomorrow."

"But, Angelique," pleaded the old man, anxiously, "is ill—she has caught some fever, and the doctors do not think favourably of her condition. She has asked for you with the greatest impatience. You must consider, Monseigneur, that it is a great many days since you have come to see her."

"I cannot come now, Steffani; I am sorry; give her all kind greetings and say I will come tomorrow."

"Monseigneur, she is ill, she is really ill, and nothing will console her but a visit from you. She suffers, poor child."

"I will come tomorrow," repeated Haverbeck, pleasantly. "Give her all my regrets and say I will bring her tomorrow that lace headdress she has been always wanting."

"And where are you going?" asked the old man, sorrowfully; he lingered with regret by the fine horse and handsome rider.

"To Arnsdorf."

"Oh, to Arnsdorf!"

"You are surprised, my dear Steffani, I confess I am surprised myself; nevertheless I must go immediately. I rely on you to look after Angelique."

He saluted and rode away down the crowded street.

The old Italian stood forlorn, jostled by the passers-by. He was struck, he was dismayed, he was discomfited that Haverbeck should return to Arnsdorf. He connected it in his mind with the approaching marriage of the Elector, of which everyone was talking, and he thought, in his simple fashion, that if the Elector married the Margravine of Anspach then Haverbeck could marry Madelon von Neitschütz. And Angelique . . . with the air of one who has received a cutting rebuff the old man crept into the hired coach and ordered the men to take him back to the house on the Bächnitz road from which he had started on his eager errand of love.

While this humble coach rattled through the narrow crowded streets, while Haverbeck rode swiftly the great post-road out of Dresden towards Arnsdorf, Johann Georg was closed in an inner cabinet, where he had retired, contrary to all ceremony and all obligation, immediately after his interview with Haverbeck, leaving those in attendance on him doubtful as to his mood or his intention.

After impetuously locking the door he flung off his coat, tore off his neck-cloth, and tossed himself on to a yellow-striped sophy that stood beneath the high-set window. His meeting with Haverbeck had reduced him again to those depths of agony from which he had with difficulty dragged himself. He had been maddened by the sight of the handsome stately soldier, so trim, so elegant, so master of himself—her favoured lover, no doubt!

the man before she had paraded his—Johann Georg's—pitiful boyish weaknesses, his silly raving letters—a man in everything different from himself—a man indeed, a man of action and experience, where he was but a boy and a fool who knew nothing, whom everyone had kept ignorant and dependent, who had become the victim of a hard, designing woman, and her villainous brothers and father.

The young Elector's long passion for Magdalena Sibylla had kept him largely in a world of fancy and far from any gross surfeiting delights. His disposition was soft and romantic; he had indulged many a daydream and many a fairy flight of fancy and rapture. Now all this inner world had been ruthlessly destroyed; he was not only outraged and shocked, but desperately lonely. He lamented an infinite devastation. . . .

Count Stürm, knowing with whom he dealt, had not risked any chivalrous reaction in favour of Magdalena Sibylla. That morning he had taken the young Elector to the house of Fani von Ilten and, in the presence of that woman and Madame de Rosny, the humiliated youth had learned from the poisoned accents of vice how ridiculous is virtue. He had heard honour coldly derided, love and all its attendant generosities put to scorn; he had been shown that he had wandered in the Eden of a simpleton.

Madame de Rosny, respectful, deferential, simpering, had put before him a sordid picture of the establishment of Major General von Neitschütz.

She had described to him very clearly all the shifts, intrigues, manœuvres, of which he had been the victim. She had told him how Madelon had been expressly trained to entrap him, how from a child she had been taught to regard him as her fool, take her advantage and her profit out of his boyish passion, how she had laughed at him— Oh, Madame de Rosny could recall very exact occasions with full detail—how she had laughed at him and preferred always Delphicus de Haverbeck, with his dark good looks and his manly ways, even as a boy—his superior in intelligence and education.

Madame de Rosny could recall how the girl had talked of her plans to rule Saxony when she was the Electress, and to keep her cousin Delphicus about her court.

Fani von Ilten, too, had her share to add. She could remember how the two young officers—Casimir and Clement—had boasted in their cups with their women over the gambling table of their sister's influence over the Elector, of the imbecile she had made of him; how she led him like a tame bear and fed him when she would with honey, and when she would, muzzled him, and used the whip; how when she was firmly on the electoral throne she had declared she would dispense all the benefits of the country to her hungry and starving relations. Who could hope to climb who had not a wife, or daughter, or sister to dispose of? The House of Neitschütz need not trouble about merit—they would rise to great eminence on the pretty shoulders of Madelon. . . .

The wretched youth listened sullen, maddened—one world dissolved, another re-formed before his inner gaze. Nauseated with his own folly, he believed that these people had revealed to him things as they were. . . . It seemed to him that honour, and truth, and love were indeed matters for children and fairy-tales. . . . Every woman was a harlot and every man a pander, and nothing so stupid as the innocence that made you the prey of knaves.

Now, secretly locked into his inner closet, he threw his head upon his arms and wept.

For he had loved her.

Not only with a pure and delicate passion, but with kindness, with affection, with gratitude. She was, as she had boasted, in all his superior, and he had been humble before her. He could recall how she had helped him, inspired and stimulated him—with his lessons, with his fencing, with his horses! How much he had learnt from her, and all the while she was laughing, exposing him—his stupidity, his weaknesses and his clumsiness—to that other man, that dark handsome young soldier who had

smiled at him just now and told him of the miserable state of his own army, who had despised his troops to his face.

His powerful shoulders heaved with heavy sobs.

How coldly pitying Stürm's dull gaze had been, how blighting had been the vindictive looks of those raddled old harlots; why had he gone there to expose himself to such a humiliation?

He had gone because he wanted to hear himself, because he could scarcely believe what his minister had told him. He had gone out of a frightful fascination to learn with his own ears of the vileness of the world.

He had learnt.

What had they said?

"Women are like that, sir, to catch a prince, to catch any man worth while."

What had they said?

There had even been an incantation of drugs, of witchcraft, of waxen images being melted before a slow fire, of potions mixed with drink. . . . Perhaps Madelon had done that—perhaps she had enchained him by such filthy means.

He sat up, shuddering.

Surely it was not natural, the passion, the need he felt for her even now—even after this?

He put his hand to his painful and swollen eyes and saw his fingers wet with tears.

"They have made me weep, and I have disgraced myself."

The youth struggled with his agony, and snatched at the thought of revenge. He was master, at least, and he could lower them as they had lowered him. He knew now that they were down in the dust and he could put his foot on them. Ruined, broken, starving—all of them, and he their master! He must keep that before him—the fact that he was their master.

He dragged himself to his feet, the long struggling sobs discomposing him, and went into a small inner toilet closet, where a silver tap was placed above a white alabaster basin in the form of a shell. Johann Georg turned on the water violently.

He took the napkins that lay on the shelf beneath, dipped them in the water and bathed his hot face.

He would be a resolute prince. He would re-form his army and be strong in the circle of the Empire, but not with Delphicus de Haverbeck's help. He would be his own general, his own field-marshal, his own leader. He dashed the cold water over his smarting eyes, his red face, his thick neck, his bright, thick hair. His cravat and his waistcoat were wetted.

"My God, that they should have made me weep! I can remember when she made me weep before, and I was a child then."

He bit his swollen lip to force back the sobs, he held the soaking cloths to his eyes.

When he took them away and saw the drops running down on to his hands he remembered a day, oh, years and years ago!—they had played together by a fountain, and so the drops had splashed on to him then—wetting her, wetting him. They had been happy and Haverbeck had watched them.

He leant his heavy handsome head against the wall and felt nauseated to the soul; the wet napkin dripped in his fingers. He put it again to his forehead, to his eyes, and thrust it into his mouth to stifle his sobs.

"My God! I'll be revenged for this— My God! I'll make them pay!"

He thought of a way to punish them, to satisfy his own cheated senses, to outrage Haverbeck. He, too, would show that he could play the filthy game in which everybody was engaged, from which he, as a fool, as a boy, had hitherto been maliciously excluded; he would treat honour, love and women as they had revealed to him these should be treated.

He choked into the wet napkin, cursing his awful tears.

"Damn them for this, making me weep!"

FIVE

Madelon prepared for the Elector's visit and put what decency and dignity she could into her household for the reception of her lover. From the sweet confusion of the neglected garden she had brought in early roses, saffron-colour like her hair and white like her bosom, armfuls of rosebay or oleander, sprigs of her jasmine, and a few golden tulips, cherry-bay, valerian, bugloss.

These brought some gaiety into the gloomy dark and shabby chambers, and gave a tender freshness to the close air; she set them where she could, in light bouquets.

Madelon lingered in the kitchen of Arnsdorf. She had been straining a jelly, using a little musk in the running, and saffron to colour it yellow; then washed the bag in cold water and dried her hands, which smelt faintly of the musk. The weather had become suddenly warm, and the day seemed very long. She had drawn the curtains across the window, shutting out the sunshine and the voluptuous breeze from the garden. She wore a grogram gown, with a linen apron, her sleeves were turned back, a plain darned muslin kerchief veiled her bosom. She had given her orders for the day, and set out the herbs, the preserves and the salads for the making of the dishes. She found that she best quelled her own impatience by attention to these details.

Madelon supervised the supper—the pasties, the pies, the jellies, the sweetmeats and the wine—a wedding festival; she wished it to be orderly, sweet, dignified.

Early in the afternoon all these preparations were complete; leisure was long in Arnsdorf, there was now nothing more to be done. Madelon went to her own chamber; some money and

trouble had been spent upon this apartment which was far more pleasant than any other in the château. Its walls had been freshly painted white; Madame de Rosny and Madelon, herself, had worked the twill hangings at windows and bed, flounces and valances of white twill, broidered in coloured wools. There was a Persian cloth on the floor and the furniture was polished and well-kept. A garderobe of chestnut-wood held Madelon's few dresses. She opened this now and turned over her possessions, for among them she must select a marriage-robe. They had been turned about, refurbished and recut, according to the fashion, re-ruffled and re-befrilled often enough, but Madelon's fastidious taste was satisfied with none of them. She selected, however, a white sarcenet with coral ribbons and put the gown and petticoat, bodice and kerchief, ruffles and shoes, on the bed in readiness for that evening. She did not concern herself about this—the Elector was not expected until the evening. Thoughtful before the mirror, she brushed and combed her dark saffron crocus-hue curls, twisted these into a knot at the nape of her neck and fastened them with silver pins.

Her brothers had arrived that morning to be the witnesses of her secret marriage; they were excited, in a good humour; they had praised her.

They had now gone out shooting with her father and Gottfried to wile away the heavy time. Madelon was alone in the house. The day was one of overpowering warmth and sweetness. Madelon felt an enchanting lassitude in her limbs. In spite of herself her mind went into daydreams.

Madelon wandered into the deserted and neglected garden in which all the flowers that survived—pinks, wallflowers, marigolds, jacinths—were those that had been planted years before, mingled now with hardy weeds and field blossoms, and no one had disturbed them. The day was so beautiful that Madelon felt happy for that cause alone. She passed delicately down the ruined walks, her fingers lovingly touched the overgrown hedges of box where the pale leaves were set in the dark leaves. She came to the fountain which had long ceased to flow with

water, and to the screen of hornbeam which had long ceased to be clipped and now grew wild with broad pronged leaves shooting heavenwards.

Madelon seated herself on the edge of the fountain and looked into the wide stone bowl which was still damp and lined with frail, fresh moss, little cups and spikes of pink and gold. Close beside her grew the pale-leaved and tender rosy flowers of the oxalis, or wood-sorrel, the purple buds of the orchids, the fading clusters of the long primroses and violets nestling beneath the shadow of the stone brim. The wych-elms were shining with an untarnished green, the laurel was putting forth formal and glossy leaves; across the tranquil, golden-blue stillness broke the silver flash of a dove in flight. It mounted, turned, circled, and disappeared.

Something—she knew not what—had come and gone—she knew not where. The dove flew past again, and a sudden most delicious breeze disturbed the flowers to a fresher fragrance; they seemed to wake, to move, to sing; the blue of the sky became more intense, shy, innocent, and secret festivities were being held in the neglected garden in the deserted park. Madelon was one with this jocund carnival of summer which seemed to her to be spread abroad solely for her entertainment. The white butterfly hovered closer to her and she had a sudden whim to seize it; her fair hand went out shading her face, the creature escaped her and flew high over a bed of gladden lilies, whose green sheaths boldly pierced the earth.

The butterfly flew back, hesitated, circled, came almost within her grasp, and was gone, high over the trees, until it had vanished into the golden dust of the azure summer day.

Madelon came out by the stables; so poor after the superb Marstall in the Residenzschloss; she would have a Polish horse the colour of foam on the Elbe when the thrusting ice blocks broke in spring.

Gottfried, the gardener, was working in the stables, setting without interest slips of maranthes and anemonies in pots and cases.

Madelon paused and spoke:

"The Spanish jasmine by my window is sprouting—it needs tying and nailing."

"Everything is neglected, Fräulein," replied the man, stolidly; "the glass-houses are empty, and the Corony gardens gone to waste, the mural trees will hardly bear this year."

"Yet," replied Madelon, gently, "you can prune my jasmine. I do not, Gottfried, regret your knots, borders, and edgings—the flowers are lovely when they grow free."

She peeped into the dark, cool shadow of the stables; the stalls were empty save for Faggott Spray, her bay mare; her father had said he must sell the horse, unless soon—

The very air was blue about her, so warm and sweet; against the stable wall spread a blossoming wall pear, round the smooth stem, starry double daisies, tufted narcissi, white violets, and ladies' smock bloomed in modest fragrance; an old hound was asleep on the hot stones of the court; the gates stood open on a lonely stretch of road.

"Oh, Gottfried, this is a beautiful day!" cried Madelon.

The peasant rested his earth-stained hands together on his trowel on the sill of the stable window, and looked at her; he had heard talk; the women chattered; he could remember the long visits of the violent young Prince; it seemed odd and like a gossip's tale, but perhaps he would marry her; perhaps this maiden would be a Princess; even to Gottfried's simplicity she was remarkable; she seemed full of light, as if the sun shone through her; those carelessly adjusted locks were of the richest gold in the pure strong daylight—"the colour of the money the Kobolds bury in the depth of the forest," thought Gottfried.

Madelon had forgotten him; she had forgotten the invisible presence that had hovered beside her under the dark branches of the cedar; the calm day was so delicious; no one would disturb her for many hours, a shining space of dreaming leisure lay before her; she would only hear the agreeable murmur of the women in the kitchen, the cooing of the doves, the splash of water thrown from buckets as they washed the vestibule, a clock

ticking, and a little whisper in the trees at the side of the house, for she meant to sit in the library among the old school books, and perhaps play on the half-muted ancient virginals.

Gottfried returned stolidly to his toil, which was a tribute to her—a few flowers for the parterre on the terrace beneath her window. . . .

"I'll tie up the jasmine, Fräulein, but it is a Persian, not a Spanish plant."

"Yes, I remember."

She recalled the presence of Gottfried and that of Faggott Spray in the warm dusk of the stables; she felt a glow of affection for both of them, faithful, patient creatures; when she had power she would see they were both rewarded.

Madelon returned slowly towards the terrace of the château—how warm, how still, how sweet; she heard a horseman enter the courtyard.

It was not Johann Georg, surely, too early! No! She smiled at her own expectations.

The postboy with the *Gazette*—she hoped it was he; if the *Gazette* were late her father was angry. But the horseman was Haverbeck; she waited for him to dismount.

"I thought it was the postboy," she remarked, as he came up to her.

"I passed him," replied Haverbeck, who did not say that he had taken the copy of the *Gazette* from him and that it now lay in his pocket.

He did not choose that what he had to say to Madelon should be said in the light of the knowledge of the Elector's approaching marriage.

"Where are your father and brothers?"

"They are in the park somewhere, shooting; I do not know—they will not return till the evening."

"Why, then, I am fortunate; it was you I came to see."

"After so many years! I can hardly remember when you were at Arnsdorf before."

"But *I* can remember very well."

"You are tired, dusty, thirsty?" she asked, negligently. "You have ridden from Dresden? How can I serve you? I am at leisure, my duties are done."

She thought to herself:

"Why has he come? And he must go before the Elector arrives."

But there were some hours before that visit and it was pleasant, it was more than pleasant, to have the company of Delphicus de Haverbeck.

"You may bring me, if you will, a pitcher of water." They entered the château together. He laid down his hat and gloves on the window seat in the hall. "Let me speak to you, Madelon, seriously and at peace."

She did not wish to take him into the main room of the château, where preparations had already been made for the reception of Johann Georg, nor to remain with him in the vestibule, where the servants would observe them.

She half hesitated over the project of taking him to walk with her in the ruined garden, but she rejected this, for she did not wish him to observe the extent of their poverty.

"Come into the old library," she decided. "It has been shut up since Maestro Steffani left. Do you know what has become of him?" she added.

"He is safe and content," replied Haverbeck; "he has found another position in Dresden. I continually see him."

"I am glad. Yet I used to think him very dull."

She led the way up the stairs and to the library, which had remained so clearly impressed on the mind of Haverbeck as the scene of his interview with the old pedant on the last occasion when he had been at Arnsdorf, when he had returned after an absence of five years and found nothing changed. Again after another absence of eight years, nothing was changed. The old dusty books, the harpsichord with the strings wrested awry, the virginals with their cracked, painted garlands of stard and bell flowers, and the *mappamondo,* yellow, wrinkled, the chairs of worn leather and used damask, all in dust and sunshine. And

Madelon, with one quick movement, had pulled aside the heavy curtains which shut out the summer.

"Nobody comes here but myself," she said. "Here I retreat sometimes and continue my studies and practise my music."

"The room," answered Haverbeck, "is the sweeter for it."

"I will fetch your water."

She left him.

Haverbeck seated himself in the chair which had been occupied, as he so keenly remembered, by the old pedant, when he had last visited this anciently-furnished, pleasant room. He was glad that she had chosen this place, glad of the sunshine of early afternoon which had filled every cranny of the chamber. Glad, too, of the broad golden leafage of the beech trees without the windows that blocked out the summer sky; glad they were young and together. . . .

Madelon returned.

On an iron tray she brought a thick stone jug of water and a Rhenish rummer, and set them before Haverbeck.

"How imposing you are in your uniform," she smiled. "I used to read about your exploits in Hungary. Why have you never come to see us before? It is because of my father and brothers, I suppose? They are not always here, and you should not mind them."

Haverbeck poured out and slowly drank a rummer of water, then he asked:

"Madelon, will you marry me and go immediately with me to Vienna?"

"You have twice asked my father that question," replied the girl; she continued with a harshness he had not expected, "And my answer is the same as his. No, Delphicus, no." For all this show of resolution she was weak enough to add:

"Why do you ask me?"

"Because I love you, I suppose, perhaps because you love me, and I, knowing it, must return to you again and yet again. Always, as I think—whatever happens."

"You have never wooed me," mused Madelon.

She sat down on the other side of the table, near where stood the faded virginals, with the cracked garlands of blue, yellow and green flowers. She interlaced her small fingers, and placed her chin on them, with her elbows on the ink-stained table.

"Perhaps, because you were always mine."

Madelon laughed.

"I shall marry the Elector, Delphicus."

"Are you so sure of that?"

"Sure enough."

"But you do not love him?"

"He does not displease me," replied Madelon.

Haverbeck gazed at her with an immense tenderness, at those lovely smoothly-brushed and neatly-knotted curls, those exact small features and large golden eyes, at her darned, washed gown, so neat, so trim, her ironed ribbons, her bare wrists and throat, her softly-rounded figure, so fine, so delicate.

"Darling girl," he whispered softly, "do not refuse me. I think you my match in mind and enterprise. I know you are ambitious and have been denied much you should have, but I believe I can satisfy you as well as myself."

"You have no fortune, Delphicus," she sighed, quietly. "You, as I, are equipped only with your person and your wit."

"And I have done well enough," replied the young soldier, earnestly; "I have no great hopes of promotion in Saxony, but in the Empire, in Cassel, or in Venice I might rise sufficiently high to support even a proud wife, perhaps to do as much for you as your Elector could, Madelon."

"You try to tempt me with an ignoble lure," cried the girl, with sudden emotion. "If I married you, Delphicus, it would hardly be for pomp and power!"

"Yet these things you value, and I also. I am not made for a mean station, nor for a hermitage; I am neither taken with the speculations of philosophers, nor the fancies of the priests—a simple man of action, a gentleman at arms. I have found life agreeable to my senses and plain to my understanding—as you

also find it, I think, Madelon. In denying me, you deny yourself. Come with me to Vienna. For I do love you."

Madelon pressed her chin more firmly on her locked hands:

"And what else do you offer me?" she urged. "The Elector can give me authority and luxury and love; believe me that he, too, loves me, is obedient to me as a slave to his master. What can you add to this?"

"I can add honour; I offer you honour and fair fame," said Haverbeck, leaning towards her across the table.

"Do you not think I shall have honour as the Elector's wife?" She, too, leant across the virginals, the space between them.

"Only worldly honour, my Madelon. You know, my young darling, that you serve the turn of your father's and your brothers' ambition, and that this marriage has in it nothing noble."

"You will be the only one, Delphicus, to say that; I shall be respected and admired by all. It is useless for you to assail me with your fair arguments, my mind is resolved, my heart armed."

The young soldier's dark eyes bent on her looks of compassion and love.

"Do you believe in God, Madelon?"

"I should be a good Lutheran if I had not read so many books of philosophy."

Haverbeck rose.

"Madelon, it is persistently rumoured that the Elector marries with the Margravine of Anspach."

Madelon was not startled.

"That is but the intrigue of Count Stürm, and I do not fear him."

"Madelon, it is in the *Gazette* this morning. I hoped without my telling you this that you would have been inclined to me."

"Your news," said the girl coldly, "alters me not. Count Stürm could put what he pleases in the *Gazette,* he could spread abroad what news he pleases, the Elector will come here and marry me tonight."

"Then I will leave you to your preparations. I will depart before I meet your father and your brothers."

He would have gone immediately, but Madelon had risen as swiftly as he had, and come round the table and caught him by the wide cuff and shirt ruffles.

"Delphicus, I shall be many hours alone yet. Do not go; why cannot we talk together? We are not children now. When I am the Electress, I will still be your friend." Her warm loveliness was close to him.

"But I shall not be yours," replied Delphicus, tenderly. "When I leave you now, it will not be to return, even after another eight years. I have offered three times for you, Madelon; I have waited all my life. I think of you continuously. I can never be the object of your coquetry."

Madelon clasped her arms round his arm; she was shaken by an unreasonable fear of his departure—a sense of panic, of terror, weakened her. . . . She thought that if he left her she would be somehow abandoned to all evil, that in him she beheld a final defence against unspeakable and unappeasable calamity; she shuddered, considering the return of her father and her brothers—hunters avid for the game—with revulsion; disgust filled her at the thought of the Elector's visit, at the long and subtle preparations, the part she was to play in which she had been so carefully schooled; the visit of the pastor which had been so adroitly arranged, the triumphant shout of "Caught, at last," which she knew would echo in her father's heart when the blond young man, shaken with passion, confused with wine, would sign their marriage contract; and at what must follow, their night together, her surrender of she knew not what to an impatient master.

Haverbeck waited; not urging her.

Here was a man she could trust; he would never offend and never betray. She adored in him his control of his desires; a man, not a boy. When she was with Delphicus she knew what honour meant. He would never touch her without her consent. Standing now so close to his steady presence, yearning for his

embrace, almost she was tempted away from all the inducements, from that fortune to which she had dedicated herself so skilfully and so readily. If he was to have been the bridegroom tonight . . . ah, she would not be afraid.

There was, too, that little coiled fear of failure, always at the bottom of her heart, which had leapt to life at the words Delphicus had spoken—"Madelon, it is rumoured!" "Madelon, it is in the *Gazette!*"

Supposing, after all, Count Stürm triumphed and Johann Georg did not come tonight? Almost she was tempted—with Delphicus de Haverbeck surely she need not fear failure; he had said he would set her high enough. He might be a Prince of the Empire, a soldier so successful as to be able to compete on more than an equality with the Elector of Saxony. Let that go, those issues were vague and confused. . . . Supposing she admitted to herself that she loved this man—almost she was tempted when he stood so near. . . .

She said, fingering his laces, looking down:

"If I were to consent, like a crazy creature, to what you suggest, Delphicus, would you take me away now, at once?"

"If you wish, I would take you away! We could be married at once."

That was an enticing fancy.

To go away at once to another world, another air—never to see again the anxious faces of those three men looking to her for all their sordid fortunes . . . Never to behold again the flushed countenance of that enraptured youth waiting for her simulated response to his passion . . . Never to have to pretend, or lie, or flatter—to be able to allow the soul to go with the body, the mind with the senses.

She dropped her hand from his steady arm and moved away, tormented: this time it was he who followed her and caught her gently by the wrist.

"Madelon, cannot you decide? Madelon, is it so difficult?"

"You should not have come," breathed Madelon, looking at him over her shoulder. "It was wrong in you to come—our lives

lie so far apart, they cannot cross: you should have left me to what has been arranged for me. I was fully resolved."

"So was I," he replied, still holding her wrist and looking down at her with a sad gaiety. "Twice I have been rebuffed by your father, many times slighted and ignored by your brothers: believe me, it was not easy for me to come to Arnsdorf, Madelon. Yet more difficult to keep away—you in the hands of three such men—my cousins and uncle: and I loving you, Madelon, how could I stay away?"

Madelon hesitated. She believed that she could not much longer resist him. A man like that, surely he loved her, surely, he was her true lover?

Madelon returned to the chair by the old virginals, and put her face in her hands, endeavouring to shut out her sense of the overwhelming presence of her lover: the moment was, to her, beautiful: she felt that she had always been fond of this shabby room because one day this would happen between the dark walls lined with their old school books and the portraits of her ancestors: had she not always felt an affection for the *mappamondo* in the brass frame, because one day he would stand beside it, waiting for her answer?

All was dear, familiar, charming: there had always been an enchantment in the old library where Madame de Rosny and her father so seldom came, where the humble Italian had spoken, timidly (as a gloss on his lessons), of virtue and honour . . . even when she was a child, playing by the fountain, this man had looked at her and loved her . . . this was a happy hour: she gazed at him between her fingers; how careful she must be not to under-value this happy moment, what fine, soft language she must use to break this high and extraordinary silence! . . . He looked at her, with his fingers on the yellow faded globe, and the sunshine, now veiled, penetrated thick leaves and dusty panes, to fall in a vague glimmer over him as he stood—waiting, gazing at her, and yet beyond her, as if she was but the symbol of some felicity more magnificent than could be contained in a mortal frame.

Haverbeck laughed as a man might laugh before an amazing circumstance of happiness: Madelon laughed also.

The door opened with a harshness that jarred all her nerves. She looked round, startled and angry. It was her brother, Casimir, who had entered.

The greeting between the two men was stern.

Casimir von Neitschütz at once occupied himself with his sister whose disordered and distracted look alarmed him. He had returned to the château because he had quarrelled with his father and brother, and his vexed mood had been further exasperated by learning immediately on his return of the arrival of General de Haverbeck, which had heartily alarmed him: he leant over Madelon and in an imperious tone demanded what was the meaning of her flushed and excited air?

Casimir von Neitschütz resembled his sister in his person: he was florid, bright brown in hair and eyes, not yet ruined by indulgence, disappointment and folly, but already marked by them, the fineness of his traits blurred, his lids swollen, his glance vicious, his gestures unsteady, his voice uncertain: he had that effrontery that comes from a consciousness of birth, youth and power over inferiors and flatterers: his appointments were showy: Madelon did not answer him, Haverbeck considered him with slight compassion.

"What is this, sir, and why are you here enclosed with my sister?"

"I am asking for the third time, for your sister's hand," replied Haverbeck. "I am here on an open and plain-hearted errand. You shall not provoke me."

Madelon turned to her brother with mingled apprehension and appeal.

"You break in on us rudely, Casimir: this affair is between ourselves. I must have some time at my disposal."

The young man retorted angrily:

"I come home, I search for you everywhere, I hear from the groom that Delphicus has arrived, and find you closeted together!"

"He wants to marry me, Casimir, he has come from Dresden to tell me so. And I—I have listened to him."

"This is amusing," sneered Casimir.

He stared at Haverbeck, who eyed him sternly. "And as for you, my cousin," he added, insolently, "you have no estate with which to support a wife, your debts are almost as great as mine . . . under what delusion do you disturb us?"

"I have debts," replied Haverbeck, quietly, "but no difficulties. My fortune is in my own control. I have no apprehensions for the future. Your sister will be better housed, better attended, and better apparelled as my wife than she is under your father's protection at Arnsdorf. I have come under no delusion. I know your affairs very well. And my own. Put no hints, nor oppositions, nor impertinences upon me, Casimir."

Captain von Neitschütz had that amount of control which a gambler must learn: reckless and violent as he was, he could, when sober, be quiet and cunning.

"This," he declared, "is great temerity and presumption. And shall proceed no farther."

"That is for your father to say," returned Haverbeck, still quietly. "And he could not. You may leave your sister to speak her own mind. She has heard what I offer. She knows what I am."

Casimir laughed to cover his recoil of vexation at these words: he wanted to confound this detestable intruder with the news of the Elector's visit and the marriage tonight, but, alert and sly, he reflected that Haverbeck might, even now, post back to the city and concert with Stürm to prevent this.

Haverbeck crossed to the table, looked across the virginals at Madelon and said, most earnestly:

"Since he will not leave us, tell me, before his face, your answer. Do not be influenced by this displeasure rashly conceived against me—what they offer you is cold and fruitless! Love enhances life and is the only measure of content—the loose and trivial bravery they offer you is but a hurry of vanity to hide

a wretched hollowness! Look up, my young darling, and entrust yourself to me!"

Madelon did not answer, because she wished to prolong this glorious and happy moment: Casimir hung near, scowling, alarmed.

"Does he persuade you?" he sneered at his sister: "remember, you know nothing of him—what he really is and how he lives."

"No," smiled Madelon, "only his long fidelity."

Casimir laughed with a coarse ejaculation.

"I do not explain myself to you," said Haverbeck courteously, coldly addressing the young man. "Your father knows of my estate and my position, my expectations and justifiable hopes—your sister knows what I offer—you presume on your sister's presence and your interference becomes intolerable."

"Yes, Casimir," said Madelon, rising. "You must go, you offend me."

"Do I? You're bewitched, my girl. You know all about this faithful lover, eh? Do you know of his *maison du plaisir* on the Bächnitz road—and the ——"—Casimir reluctantly altered the word that came most readily on his tongue—"whom he keeps there?"

"You make this difficult for me," exclaimed Haverbeck fiercely. "I am not skilful in these weapons—"

"No? I mean to make it difficult for you," replied Casimir with insulting accents. "I have a right to ask my sister what she knows of you."

"You try to inflame me, you poor boy," said Haverbeck with his dark brows contracted. "But I'll not be provoked. Madelon, speak to me—I cannot much longer endure this."

"Does she know of your house near Bächnitz and the mistress you keep there?" demanded Casimir, coming between the lovers.

"She has no concern to know," replied Haverbeck, staring him down. "Madelon, I have not had your answer."

Madelon's face had changed, her radiancy was eclipsed; it was as if a veil had fallen over the room: a stupefying spirit of cold and darkness closed over all.

"You—you have not answered Casimir," she murmured. "About this house—"

"What has that to do with you?" replied Haverbeck, tenderly. "You know nothing of such affairs. Your brother's behaviour shames us all."

"It is a jade he has taken from the Italian Comedy—a little actress of the harlequinade," flung out Casimir. "Steffani, our old tutor, lives with them—pious hypocrite! And there's a child."

At this he stood back, half expecting to be struck, or insulted: but Haverbeck remained stately, controlled, and folded his arms on his breast.

Madelon stared and smiled at Haverbeck: she too was cool.

"You have no denial," she whispered.

"I have not kept the matter a secret; it does not touch you and me. There is no dishonour in it."

"You cannot explain—you have nothing to say?"

"Except that I am glad, Madelon," he replied, tenderly, "that you are still so inexperienced as to ask me such questions."

He glanced at Casimir, who was triumphant, defiant, but half afraid. "You blackguard," he thought, but he could not deal with Casimir in Madelon's presence: that dirty move had won the game for the mean profligate: how could he, Haverbeck, enlighten Madelon as to the difference between his own life, entirely clean and honourable, and that of her brother's life sunk in filth?

Casimir, like a reckless coward, had used the innocence they had guarded for their own ends to defeat the man who would have preserved it: with compassion and regret deeper than his anger, Haverbeck looked desperately at Madelon. He was unable to explain what was so obvious: unable to make clear what owned no mystery: unable to express regret or confusion, contrition or embarrassment, where he saw no cause for any of these emotions, unable to play the hypocrite.

"Madelon, if you send me away now I shall not come back to solicit you again, whatever your need or mine."

"I do send you away," cried Madelon; her unnatural stillness broke into a hurry of words. She moved away from him and towards her brother. "It is amusing, is it not, Casimir, for this penniless soldier of fortune to come and ask for my hand, ask me to share his debts and his difficulties, sponge on foreign courts in his company—divide his favours with public dancers? But, perhaps, he did not mean such a romantic design to be taken seriously, perhaps it may have been but a summer afternoon diversion—indeed, it has been no more for me . . . and now I'm weary of it."

Haverbeck ignored her trembling passion of humiliation and rage, ignored the sneering triumph of her brother, and spoke directly to her heart:

"Madelon, if for the last time you send me away now, I shall not come again."

"Do you think that a threat?" she smiled. "I do send you away. . . . You have been very nice and curious with me. I was a little entertained. But now it is over."

Casimir added, coarsely:

"You had better have left matters alone here, sir, your promotion will not be as rapid at the court of the new Elector as it was at that of his late Highness."

Haverbeck made a movement with his right hand as if to put the youth aside: he gave him not so much as a glance, but continued to look with regret, with compassion, with love, at Madelon.

She fully and calmly returned his beseeching gaze: she hunched her white shoulders out of the mended muslin fichu, and her fair lovely face was distorted with a sneer that trembled on the perfect lips, that narrowed the golden eyes.

And, seeing that ugly scorn upon a countenance so lately flushed with love, Haverbeck turned away: he did not glance back, but left the room immediately.

Madelon listened to his steps steadily descending the stairs.

She marvelled at her own foolishness, at her own mood of five minutes ago, when she had bent and swayed towards that

man, thought him her faithful lover, splendid, honourable . . . another woman, and a child! She was degraded by the force of her own jealousy; the revelation that had made her passionately send him away had shown her how completely she loved him: but all the beauty and the pleasure had gone, there remained only a secret, biting torture—incredible, intolerable.

The room was dull and mean to her eyes now, detestable, the sunshine was blurred over: the heralds of a storm were riding the sky: the leaves at the window shuddered together, Casimir watched her, still uneasy.

"You liked him well, eh, and you are sorry that he has gone? You'll forget him. He is always in public hurries, galloping after the world, snatching at advancements—a distracted lover."

"Who is this woman?" asked Madelon, not heeding. "I have not yet the measure of myself—it seems to me that we were all strangers talking, here where we used to do our lessons and know each other so well. What did I say? Who is she?"

"Haverbeck's mistress? A little creature from the harlequinade, that is all. He has lived with her for years. She keeps a retreat for him in his leisure. Of course, he has straggled after other pieces too. You are not the only one, my girl, who has liked his cool airs and stately affectations."

"So I could guess," smiled Madelon, tapping the lid of the virginals. "But I am indifferent to him, Casimir, I was about to tell him so when you entered. Now he has gone and we shall not see him again."

Her look, in the dull storm light, was ghastly as she added:

"He'll never speak like that to me again. Never."

Madelon smiled at Casimir with an inattentive, hectic gaiety.

SIX

As the day faded the freshness and sweetness were withered from the air; dun clouds obscured the sunshine and the blue, the shadows spread and merged into a sultry frown over road and field. A light, yet persistent, wind stirred the dry dust on road and path, soiled and whitened hedgerow and wayside plant. General de Haverbeck, taking the great post-road back to Dresden, turned in his saddle more than once to observe these sultry banks of clouds advancing slowly over the purple horizon. Against such a background the young summer green loomed livid, the last blossoms of an orchard that he passed stared ghastly white. The birds had ceased to sing or had fled into the recesses of the distant forest.

Only the persistent rustle of the small breeze broke the silence when Haverbeck stopped his horse to listen on that lonely road in the scowl of the nearing storm to some soundless voice, some impalpable step, as Madelon had paused to listen in the lonely garden of Arnsdorf when she had pursued the butterfly.

Haverbeck felt as if he were accompanied by just such an impalpable presence as then had followed the girl in her solitary meditation. He believed that someone called to him, touched him on the shoulder, told him to turn back. But he was not a man of a fanciful turn.

A cloud of gnats danced before him in aimless and maddening gaiety, he brushed these aside and with them the phantasms of his brain.

He hastened his horse, hoping to reach Dresden before the storm broke, for he was without a cloak. He could see far ahead the deserted road, and there was something sinister in this gloomy solitude beneath the sky rapidly clouding over with a bronze haze.

A coach came in sight—six horses and outriders—direct from Dresden, the towers and pinnacles of which Haverbeck could now see clearly on the misted, frowning horizon. Sunshine still lingered on those walls and towers for the storm had not yet reached the city.

The Elector, thought Haverbeck; she was then right to be sure of him; I might have known Madelon.

He drew up his eager horse under a bent wayside apple-tree, where the last blossoms drifted from the forming fruit.

The equipage swept past—the cumbrous ornamental coach swinging on its buckled leathers, the arms of Saxony, the black, the gold, the electoral barret glittering on the polished sides.

The blinds were down, the windows open, and Haverbeck could see the young Elector within, sprawling on the fringed cushions. He was apparelled with great nicety; his features were swollen, he did not look like a man who went on a romantic errand of love. He noticed Haverbeck at the roadside clouded by the dust of his own hastening coach, but affected not to do so, and did not return the soldier's salutation, but frowned as if in uncertainty and perplexity. The coach rolled on, Haverbeck, turning again in the saddle, watched it out of sight, along the winding dusty post-road, but now of a staring whiteness under the rapidly darkening sky.

"Sooner Saxony than some lesser fool," mused Haverbeck, "there must be some worth in him, or he would never marry her. A scandal certainly, war, perhaps," he smiled to himself; "a Prince who can do that can rule. But not rule me," he added, touching up his horse, fiercely. "I'll take another road to fortune. Yet for her sake I'm glad. Saxony may be a man yet."

He continued his lonely and sombre way towards Dresden; the storm clouds had now encroached on the city; lurid yellow behind the gloomy bulk of the black towers of the Koenigsberg, the State prison, a high grim shape above the walls.

Clouds and masonry seemed to absorb one into the other into a single magnificent and menacing darkness of outline broken only by the colours of Saxony, the Standard of the House of

Wettin hanging sullenly from the flag pole on the topmost pinnacle of the Koenigsberg. Delphicus de Haverbeck could not choose but gaze at this, the salient point of all the dark and shrouded landscape, and as he gazed a flash of lightning rent the rolling vapour and smote across the blank bleak walls, barred windows and guarded gates of the great prison; a roll of thunder accompanied the young soldier as he rode more swiftly towards the gates of Dresden, the only man abroad in that shadowed prospect.

Magdalena Sibylla von Neitschütz also saw that flash of lightning, heard that roll of thunder.

She was in the library, where Haverbeck had left her.

The lightning darted across the place where he had stood, which, such a short time ago, had been bright with sunshine. Casimir, sprawling in front of the table with the old virginals, was teasing and tormenting her with reproaches, with advice, with recriminations.

This night was the very touchstone of their fate on which their whole fortune, honour, and reputation depended; how was it then that she could forget it, and, like a village maiden, shut herself up here with her gallant?

"If it had been the Elector now, not I, who had come in upon you—and even now you are moody and discomposed, ruffled and overcast—is it not time you changed your gown and set your hair? The most stupid bird is not caught without some lure in the net."

Madelon met him coldly. Underneath all this tirade she detected a gnawing anxiety, a keen apprehension, and she reflected how utterly, how incredibly, they would all be ruined if Johann Georg should fail her, if, after all, he should not come tonight?

She decided that she would not tell either of her brothers or her father that Haverbeck had informed her of the announcement in the *Gazette*.

"Look to yourself, Casimir, do not you betray so much agitation, see how your hand is trembling. If Johann Georg does not

come to Arnsdorf tonight, then you may scold me; but, now, let us have peace."

She spoke decisively and bitterly. The keen blast of disillusion had cleared her mind and sharpened her wits, she would have no trouble with her heart tonight. All her romantic sentimentalities and tender follies had been dissipated by what she had heard of Haverbeck. Her father and Madame de Rosny had been right when they had shown her the world as a place where men and women sold themselves for the highest possible price in the keenest possible market. The virtues were left to fools and rustics; the sole prizes worth contending for were those that could be seen and felt and touched . . . and he had gone . . . why then, this wild passion must be controlled.

She asked in a tone of almost hopeless curiosity:

"Why could you not have done something for yourself, Casimir? Why must you all rely on me?"

She glanced at him wearily; he appeared likely enough, sufficiently well-equipped, a personable, straight, healthy young man, yet he was sinking in coils of his own creation, entangled with vices, smirched with failures, appealing to a woman to make his fortune.

"How long will you keep your place when I have got it for you?" wondered Madelon with contempt for herself as much as for him.

"There will be no difficulty about that," Casimir assured her, with a sneer. "Do you think people rise by merit nowadays? I have had no opportunity, no manner of chance—what could I do with a few rix-dollars our father was able to allow me? You do not yet know, Madelon, what Dresden is, or what a man's expenses are—especially in the army. Indeed, my dear sister, I believe there is a good deal that you do not know, or you would not have been entertaining Haverbeck just now . . . nor dismissed him so easily, either."

"Madame de Rosny used to tell me that," said Madelon, dully. "When she last left me she whispered, 'There is a good deal you

do not know, my child;' yet now I think I can guess it very well."

At the mention of their ancient governess, Casimir laughed grossly.

"Madame de Rosny has found her way to Dresden—cunning devil that she is! She is in partnership with a certain Fani von Ilten, whose acquaintanceship, my dear Madelon, I do not suppose you will ever make. She keeps gambling tables and sells medicinal drugs and concoctions; she will be about you when you are at the Residenzschloss to buy face lotions and complexion washes and hair stains."

"No worse than that?" asked Madelon.

Another roll of thunder shook the air, now hot and sultry and tainted with an acrid bitterness; the room was dark; they could hardly see one another.

Casimir shrugged his epaulettes up to his powdered ears.

"A good deal worse than that, they say. All manner of filthy brews and witchcraft tricks—"

"Witchcraft," interrupted Madelon.

"Yes." Casimir lowered his voice and instinctively moved back as another flash of lightning darted between them. The storm was as sharp as sudden. "There was a woman died in the Koenigsberg the other day: they say they racked her till her limbs fell off—"

"Stop," shrieked Madelon, "stop! Why must you pester and torment me with that?"

"Why, what do you care?" asked Casimir, in startled surprise. "What is it to you? She was but some poor hussy who had got hold of a man with more money than herself and tried her charms on him. . . . I've no doubt she was in league with Satan, as they said. The new President of the Consistory, Doctor Knock, intends to be very severe with these devilish creatures. He says witchcraft is spreading in Germany."

"In the Koenigsberg," said Madelon, walking up and down; "she died in the Koenigsberg! How I have always loathed that

place! How massive it seems to rise up like a shadow over the city, over the country! Like a shadow, too, Casimir, over my heart. What does that mean? Often in the night I will wake up, dreaming of the Koenigsberg, with its locked gates, and its chambers running blood, and its wheel and scaffold in the courtyard. . . . Why do I think so much of the Koenigsberg, Casimir?"

"I do not know," replied the young man, indifferently. "I never think of it at all, though there are some people whom I should like to send there, and I daresay that Madame de Rosny, if she isn't careful, may see the interior of it some day."

Madelon was pale. She touched the notes of the old virginals with its cracked and faded garlands, but no sound came. She peered out at the fresh green leaves that had been so sweet and pleasant a screen from the sun; they appeared blighted by the storm and hung limp and bitter-hued in the sultry dusk.

"I will make myself ready," she said, absently.

"Do so," retorted Casimir, "and without delay. He should be here early if he has the impatience he should have. You look pale, Madelon, and changed. What is the matter with you?"

He gave her a prying, a hostile and agitated glance.

"The storm," whispered the girl, "the storm—why could not the sun continue today?"

"Take a glass of wine to stir your blood," said Casimir. "He must not find you dull tonight. Damn Delphicus—he's made you lovesick."

Madelon did not answer. She left the old library and went upstairs to her room where, without looking in the mirror, she clothed herself in the white sarcenet, cut too low on the bosom, showing too much of the fair round arms, drew the scarlet cord across the rich laces, put up her hair with a coral ribbon, set a scarf of golden tinsel about those wantonly exposed shoulders; there was a small flagon containing a cordial of last year's wine and spices and a greenish glass on her dressing table; she did not touch it. . . .

She went down the wide stairs, now invaded by the storm

darkness; the thunder and lightning were yet distant but rolled and flashed continuously across the neglected park, behind the empty stables, the great gates set wide for the Elector. The air seemed charged with despondencies and misgivings, fears and apprehensions.

Madelon went into the long chamber which gave upon the terrace; here the supper had been already prepared; she poured herself out a glass of wine as her brother had suggested, and then another, and drank slowly, eagerly and yet with a shudder.

She thought, curiously, "If I only do what every other woman does, why does my courage sink? I am too nice, too fastidious. I must not care whether he touches me or kisses me."

She held her wine-glass up as the thunder rolled in the empty supper-room.

"No, I must drug myself with fancy as well as wine and believe it is another man who embraces me—perhaps in the dark I can pretend. Will *he* go to that other woman now? I wonder? Years they've had love and I only fancies. How did I contrive to resist him? Was that pride—or shame? Because I was sick for him, sick—she has his child. Oh, God, this is *not* just! But there is no God nor Justice. My father said that and Madame de Rosny. Do they know? Is she fair-haired? She adores him. If he had taken hold of me, only touched me, I had gone with him, whatever Casimir had said."

She stared at the heavy wooden shield on the wall behind the table that bore the gorgeous parade of the House of Neitschütz; quartering on quartering, all the arms of the heiresses whose money had been squandered, whose bodies were dust, who had bequeathed her poverty and pride and desolation; grinning beasts, snarling birds, bars and crosses showed on the grim blazon of the shield, crowned by the grin of a vast helmet with the vizor closed, surrounded by a wreath of dead flowers and a rigid sheaf of monstrous feathers; the paint was rubbed; gules, azure, sable, argent, or alike dimmed and showing here and there the wood beneath.

The flowers she had plucked that morning wilted in the vases;

the storm filled the room and echoed from the walls; she could hear her father and Clement in the next chamber, talking angrily . . . what a zeal they had in their own interest, what a terrible, bitter concern in their own advantage . . . did the noble blood that filled their veins never swell their hearts to give their actions some touch of grandeur?

Madelon set down her glass and turned her eyes from the flaunting coat of arms.

"My spirits are fluttered. My foolish heart darkened, I must not be fixed in this emotion, this is to be a woman, wild, ignorant, an eminent simpleton."

The sneer that had been the last expression Haverbeck had seen on her face distorted her fair, childish features.

She listened; there were other sounds besides the recurrent thunder—the clatter of wheels and hoofs, the sound of shouts, commands in the courtyard.

He had then arrived.

Her doubts, her reluctances, her hesitancies, her shuddering horrors, warmed into a throb of triumph—she had at least been spared that humiliation.

He had come . . . despite Count Stürm, despite the announcement in the *Gazette*—he had come to her; he was loyal, constant, and she was grateful.

She went into the vestibule and stood by the newel-post of the stairs waiting for him. His pompous equipage filled all the small courtyard. She watched the lackey open the door and set the step. She watched Johann Georg descend. . . . He seemed so much older in that pompous heavy attire—a tall, big man, of a considerable presence.

He will be, she thought, almost a giant, for he is scarcely full grown.

He wore his Garter, newly acquired, his stars and crosses, his eagles, Black and White, of Prussia and Poland—all his hereditary august and brilliant splendours in which she had never seen him decked before.

This for her honour, no doubt, to grace their secret marriage. Madelon was grateful.

Johann Georg came across the courtyard. She watched him. He hesitated, stared at the sky, brazen in the depths of the storm, held out his hand to feel the first drops of rain, hesitated, and peered forward into the darkness of the hall beyond the threshold.

Why did he hesitate? Madelon wondered. Then he hesitated no more, but crossed the groundsill and stood before her, perceived her by the newel-post, and paused immediately, bareheaded, and the unnatural livid light behind him made his smooth blond hair, now so carefully curled, appear of an unnatural harsh brightness.

His florid, flat and comely features were swollen. Madelon thought, instinctively, that she did not like those thick fair lashes, almost white; those thick fair brows, almost white, scowling over and concealing blue eyes that had always, to her, seemed without depth, as glass. She noted his wide riband, the azure of the Garter; his State sword with diamonds, his coat of stiff silk of interchanged colours, huge in the skirts, his waistcoat was embroidered stiff, harsh, with gold bullion. He clasped his hands behind him and considered her across the storm-dark twilight.

When he had been a young child his father had bought an Italian picture by one Georgio Vasari, which showed a female head, and was termed, fancifully, Leda. Johann Georg had become desperately enamoured of this picture, for it had seemed to him the exact likeness of Magdalena Sibylla von Neitschütz, and others had remarked on the similarity of the features between the living maiden and the fabled nymph. She looked downward, three-quarter face, and sideways out of the picture. Above her serene and compassionate loveliness her hair was twisted in gilt ringlets and over all a fantasic horn-shaped hat rested above a light coronal of jewels and was garnished at the side with a dead man's face in gold. A pleated chemise dropped

beneath a robe lined and fringed again with gold and buckled with jewels on the shoulders. This picture which glowed with more than human loveliness Johann Georg had always kept behind a saffron-coloured silk curtain in his bed-chamber; it was more like Madelon than she was like herself, for it combined her fair flesh and blood with the fairer fabric of his dreams of her . . . tonight, standing in her white gown, in her coral ribbons that gleamed against the heavy dark, she appeared to him that picture and the vision of her own loveliness woven into one. The wine had flushed her cheeks and lips and brought the lustre dimmed by her unshed tears back into her lucent eyes.

They were both changed since they had last met, and changed by disillusion—he by his disillusion about her, and she by her disillusion about Delphicus de Haverbeck. Madelon advanced and spoke:

"Your Highness has just escaped the storm."

And he almost forgot her treachery, as she smiled on him with a gratitude, with a welcome that was not wholly feigned, for she honoured him for his coming to Arnsdorf.

SEVEN

When Johann Georg had first met Madelon such a delicious agony of enchantment had taken possession of him that he had nearly forgone his schemes of hatred, they had nearly passed from him like a squib of wildfire, yet when he had met the men —Neitschütz—gloomy, sullen, yet fawning and servile; his two sons with their dissipated faces and profligate air, and their exaggerated courtesies—then the young man's resolves had flamed up again in his heart, and he became more resolute to put through what he had come to Arnsdorf to do.

This scheme now seemed to him noble and worthy of a great prince.

In boyish defiant pride he had adorned himself with all the fripperies of his rank; with them he had taken to himself all the other attributes of princely dominion, his right to revenge himself, to betray those who had betrayed him, to insult where he had been insulted, to strike and strike hard and well.

On Casimir, his glance rested with the deepest loathing; but for that worthless, flaunting fool he might have died without knowing that Madelon had never loved him.

He sat at table with the woman and the three men, and more candles than the meagre household could well afford had been lit to dispel the darkness of the stormy summer night. The thunder rolled in the distance and now and then a faint fork of lightning disturbed the purple-black where the window was open.

For none could endure the shutters to be drawn so intense was the airless heat.

The Elector was at the head of the table and by his side Madelon in the white sarcenet and the coral-coloured ribbons and beads, the gaudy scarf over the exposed bosom and shoulders, too

wanton for her rank and state. Either side, Casimir and Clement, and at the end Neitschütz, scowling and uneasy beneath his exultation and his cringing servility. Even now at this culmination and climax of his wishes he detested having to bow the knee and bend the head to this flushed youth, who tonight was so arrogant, sullen and cold.

The Elector scarcely touched his meat (too sick with love, thought Casimir, with a sneer!), but he drank again and again from the green rummer filled with Rhenish wine.

"He has been drinking before he came," thought Clement, who remained the most sober of the four of them.

This Neitschütz was more handsome than his brother, and had something of his sister's beauty, and his face had been his passport to many successes in love and pleasure; recently he had been marred by a slash across the face in a duel, the half-healed scar which still showed red and puckered twisted his mouth and distorted his cheek. He was not so easy, reckless and foolish as Casimir, though his abilities were less than mediocre, and his character one filled with low vices, mean ambitions and jealousies, yet he contrived to keep his head and to make a tolerable show of composure when his own interests were at stake. He shared with his brother Casimir a cold heart and sordid mind, and had never been stirred by noble or generous emotions.

The Elector drank and laughed and replied stupidly and shortly to the remarks made to him, and stared at Madelon, so near, so temptingly adorned, and drank again.

Clement pulled the bottles from without His Highness's reach.

"He'll be so drunk we shall have to hold him up while they are being married."

But the heavy youth took his wine well; he seemed animated by some passion so intense that it resisted the fumes of the alcohol. He appeared not confused and overcome by what he had drunk, but rather exhilarated and inflamed.

He felt, indeed, remarkably clear-headed. While the meaningless coarse conversation went to and fro and he flung in his word now and then, he was sharply and keenly reviewing all

his relations with the House of Neitschütz—the days when he had come here as a child, his lessons with Madelon, his ridings with her in the woods, his dances—the saraband, the coranto—the meetings in the Residenzschloss, at Moritzburg—and these three men always in the background. . . . He was reviewing all these memories, sharp and distinct in every detail, the most important events in his short life; he laughed because of these circumstances all so bright and lovely and pleasant, all radiated with the youth and innocence and enchantment of Madelon; he recited to himself like a devil's litany the words which had fallen from the corroded lips of Fani von Ilten and the dry mouth of Madame de Rosny—words which had shown him all the treachery, all the vileness, meanness, and filth beneath this fair outward show. He had perceived on his first entry into the room, on a side table where stood a branch of candles, papers and an ink-horn, in casual readiness, no doubt, for the marriage contract. They were within reach of his hand where he now lounged in his armchair at the head of the table.

They would spare him all trouble, no doubt; above the table, he observed the huge shield of wood, painted with the full achievements of the House of Neitschütz, displaying in haughty quarterings all the insignia of honour and antiquity, all the emblems of an unblemished descent and an untainted integrity, crowned by the knightly helm and the flowing lambrequin of azure and ermine.

Johann Georg stared at this achievement where the bright worn paints gleamed in the candle-light; he stared at it again and again, and, more than once, he caught Neitschütz's sunken glance upon him as if to say:

"Despite all, as fine a show as *you* can make, Elector! A fair ancient family and the girl good enough to be *your* wife, the House of Neitschütz equal to the House of Wettin."

These two starveling officers—insolent, loud, odious, two of the men, no doubt, to whom Haverbeck had referred in his memorial—inefficient, corrupt, cowardly, failures. What had Madame de Rosny said about the old vulture's mended shirts and

his cracked boots, fishponds dried up and hedges spreading, the stables empty, black bread and cabbage to stay his proud stomach, and starvation in the kitchen—what had she said?—nothing but the foul truth; and he a simpleton not to have seen it for himself. . . .

"The thunder is coming nearer," breathed Madelon, uneasy at his distractions.

Johann Georg roused from his black thoughts to glance at her, and with eyes of a gross desire which he had never turned on any woman before.

"Nearer, eh, the thunder!" and leaning sideways, he pulled aside the enticing gauze about her bosom.

Madelon drew slightly away. Her watchful brothers sat still and alert in their places.

"Neither you nor I, Madelon, are afraid of thunder," muttered the Elector, gazing at the girl, leaning so heavily towards her that his stars touched her bare shoulders.

"Madelon is afraid of nothing, your Highness," said Casimir in a thick voice, from which he could scarcely keep the insolence.

Johann Georg grinned:

"Most of us have our demons who overtake us in the end."

He leant forward and looked round at the three intent faces, which, despite the assumed carelessness of their expression, showed an intense fire of anxiety in their golden eyes; the Elector's gaze rested on Clement's vicious countenance, the scar running from bright brown hair to chin showed livid and disgusting; Madame de Rosny, shaking with lewd laughter, had told the Elector the scandalous circumstances in which he had received that wound, and Johann Georg recalled this now.

"Major General von Neitschütz," demanded the Elector, and his voice rose with a tone of command that seemed beyond his years, "do you know why I have come here tonight?"

The old man touched his harsh and haggard face with thick fingers and replied in as steady a voice as he could contrive:

"Because of the feelings your Highness does me the honour to entertain for my daughter, Magdalena Sibylla."

"Precisely," grinned the Elector, "because of Magdalena Sibylla."

"Highness," replied the old man, grandly, scarcely able to bend himself to any further silken civilities, "you have made a choice which will not disappoint you."

The Elector laughed; his flushed face so brightly coloured with the blue eyes and golden hair, his white teeth glistening; he laughed again and again with pauses and catches in his breath; leant nearer those other watchful faces, then stretched out his elegant hand for the ink-horn; his fingers were steady, the coarse mutton fat candle in the coarse common branch cast a wavering gleam on the thick bullion on his wide cuff, the fine mesh of his lawn shirt, and the light lilies and roses design on his lace ruffles . . . he picked up the ink-horn.

"So eager to sign!" thought Neitschütz with a sneer. "I did well to have all in readiness."

The Elector raised the ink-horn, opened it, and cast the contents full at the escutcheon of the House of Neitschütz hung above.

The ink, hurled with this deliberate force, made a hideous blot on these emblazoned honours, and dripped in black drops down the glittering achievements.

The three men whose arms had been thus insultingly defiled sat motionless, but Madelon moved a little and whispered:

"Your Highness has drunk too much, the wine is new and strong and the night dangerous."

Johann Georg rose to his great height, the other three men, rigid, kept their seats:

"I have not drunk enough, Madelon," he said, "to find oblivion in my cups, if I had you might have had me yet." He glared at the three wincing, lowering faces.

"Up, I say, am I not your Prince? To your feet, I say!"

They rose stiffly; Neitschütz leant against the table stupidly.

They all waited for the young man to speak. He took from his breast pocket, fumbling underneath his stars and crosses and ribbons, the three letters, something soiled now. He put them

down before Madelon on the table; kept his finger on them and looked at her.

"Whatever it is," muttered Neitschütz in broken tones, "it can be explained, I can assure you, your Highness, I can assure your Highness, it can be explained."

"No more explained than that!" cried the Elector, looking up. He pointed to the blot that he himself had cast on the achievements of Neitschütz; the worn wood had soaked up the ink—a stern abatis on the blazon. "This is my letter to your daughter, and these two are hers to your son, Casimir."

Casimir caught his head in his hands with a groan; he saw the whole disaster in the most ugly of flashes. . . . Ilten, the filthy old harridan, had betrayed him. . . . Stürm had won—the man with the money-bags always won! . . . He saw himself on the brink of a most sordid damnation . . . the other two glancing at him in terror could guess that some ghastly mischance had occurred.

Madelon leant towards the youth towering in his agonized rage, his outraged pride and vengeance, and, plucking at his sleeve, forced him to look at her beauty.

"Does this make any difference?" she asked, "if you want me, Johann Georg. I am not less the creature who has always pleased you, who knows how to please you always . . ."

He considered her and the three wretched men waited, daring to hope that even now she might re-exercise her powerful seduction over his infatuate mind. The young man considered her. She was Leda—the goddess of the Italian picture but a goddess discrowned.

"Yes, I want you, Madelon," he answered brutally, "but your value has sunk."

He had been cheated of his love but would not be, he told himself ferociously, of his desires. He would have all she had to offer any man—the fair body which hid the treacherous heart, the shallow soul, the scheming mind.

He turned to the father, to the brothers, and said in tones of the bitterest and most contemptuous insult:

"I am your prince, not your fool."

Then, to the old man:

"Major General von Neitschütz, send your daughter to my room within the hour or look for no toleration from me."

"To your room?" stammered the old man, leaning heavily on the table. "I have not heard aright."

"You have heard well enough—I will have the room I had as a child sometimes, near the library—you remember it? If not, there are those who will show you the way. I think you are in a mire of difficulties—you and your two sons—you may sink and strangle in them if you keep Madelon from me tonight. Come, yours is not the first ancient house that has bred a harlot."

Major General von Neitschütz leant heavily on his hands which rested on the table; he seemed absorbed in an effort to hold himself upright. His eyes were cast down, and their sockets seemed blind and hollow. His two sons did not speak. The nearer grumbling of the thunder filled the room and emphasized their ignoble silence; it was as if they were mute before some higher terror than mere human rage and shame.

"You have not seen," added the Elector, "tonight's *Gazette,* I think? In it is the announcement of my marriage to the Margravine of Anspach—that will be by now concluded; my proxy left Dresden two days ago."

"Oh," said Major General von Neitschütz, "oh!"

Johann Georg stretched out his hand towards Madelon, who still remained mute and rigid, leaning towards him.

"Come to me, or let me come to you, within the hour—I give you one hour or tomorrow your father and your brothers will be cashiered. And you," he added with supreme bitterness, "you, Madelon, you must look to some other man to pay your price."

Even then she would have caught at his sleeve and endeavoured to detain him, she tried to speak but he put her aside and not gently; sweat had broken out on his forehead and round his lips, he wiped this away, but the drops started again immedi-

ately; the brilliants on his stars sent out winking rays of malicious light.

"An hour," he repeated thickly, "an hour."

He passed her and strode away; Madelon did not look after him; as he left the room she fell into his empty chair and clutched at the table-cloth.

"Blast him!" muttered Casimir, as the door shut sombrely in the shadows. "Damn and blast him!"

General von Neitschütz, looking up, make a shaking gesture with an unsteady hand towards the blotched escutcheon.

"Take that off," he stammered, "wipe that off—quick! Clement! Casimir! one of you—cleanse the Achievement!"

But Casimir was too shaken to move, too absorbed in the contemplation of his own peculiar hell.

Clement staggered round the table, snatched out his lace handkerchief, and fumbled it over the ink: the stain had laid there too long, it was already deeply-ingrained into the wood where the paint was worn away.

With a trembling curse Clement von Neitschütz poured some wine over his handkerchief and daubed that over the ink so that a veil of black and red mingled was over the entire shield—the black and red together stained his own fingers and ruffles.

"It won't come off," he snarled, "it won't come off."

He returned to his place tearing at the handkerchief and wiping his fingers on a napkin. "What does that matter? What do you think of that?"

"No," said the old man, "it won't come off."

He sat down, fingered his lips, stared round him. "What are we going to do?"

"Kill him," sobbed Casimir, wildly. "I'll do it. We have no one here except a few lackeys in the kitchens—they're shut away."

"Have you a mind to hang on the wheel?" demanded Clement, fiercely. "There was a man last week lived three days, broken, begging every passer-by to put him out of his agonies. Do you fancy that?"

"We've got to kill him," insisted Casimir. "There's no other way."

"The torture chamber in the Koenigsberg," replied Clement, "do you fancy that?"

Madelon spoke in a strained thin voice:

"Since you speak of killing, my brother, why did you not strike him down at once?"

"He is a big drunken animal," groaned Casimir.

"You couldn't face him," whispered Madelon. "You'd get him from behind, I suppose?"

"A pistol shot," breathed Casimir, "from the doorway—it might pass as an accident. . . . We need one of Madame de Rosny's philtres." He pulled himself up sharply. "Don't stare at me like that, my father, it is not my fault."

The old man broke into swift fury:

"Whose fault is it then, you lying weakling, you boasting coward, you ruffling rake and puling fool? Who but you, you small-witted profligate, chambering in a gambling hell, would have thought of showing those letters to a trull like Fani von Ilten?"

"It was Count Stürm," protested the frantic young man, shuddering, "it was his devilish work. How was I to know? I was desperate. How do you expect a man to live in a city like Dresden?"

"Count Stürm," interrupted his father, stupidly, "yes, this is all the work of Count Stürm."

Clement broke into ferocious recriminations against his brother: he was still endeavouring, with frantic gestures, to cleanse his hands from the mingled ink and wine.

He began to spit out his agonized rage in reproaches against his brother, and gave foul glimpses of their common life: he recalled nauseous follies on Casimir's part, disgraceful entanglements, dishonourable debts: and Madelon listened.

She had guessed much of this, but much was new.

But the old man heard not a word of what his elder son raved of: with closed eyes he peered into the blackness of un-

fathomable misfortune, every hope frustrated, every expectation laid low, the last and most intolerable of insults hurled at his head—in a moment when he had hoped for triumph . . . Stürm's work!

Stürm's delight at this!

The humiliation and degradation, the thin cackle of his enemies' laughter: he had no friends: his intolerances, his arrogance, his poverty, had alike kept him isolated.

Always he had staked on his daughter.

He began to think of the money he had spent on her—of the mortgages, the sold acres, the neglected lands, the dismissed servants, the empty stables—all squandered on Madelon, her clothes, her education, her adornment, her training! He remembered Madame de Rosny, who had schooled her and whom he had thrust out lest she should too dangerously corrupt the girl, and who had now stung him in the heart—a viper whom he had fed and flattered! stung him in the heart, the slimy traitress!

He heard his daughter's voice, cool and clear above the continuous thunder, penetrating the dark agony of his own tumultuous thoughts.

"Stop, my brother, do not abuse Casimir like this: let us think what we are to do, what is before us."

"There is nothing we can do." Clement was sullen, pulled up short in his invective. "We might kill him, as Casimir suggested, and fly into Bavaria. I do not think we have a chance, we are too well known, we have no money."

"Perhaps," whispered Casimir, "Haverbeck—" He looked at his sister. "Delphicus was here this afternoon," he muttered, "he might—"

"I have sent away Delphicus de Haverbeck," said Madelon.

"Then there is nobody—nothing," raged Clement. "He'll marry the Anspach woman and we shall be cashiered. What I possess won't meet what I owe my sutler."

Casimir poured himself out more wine and drank greedily with both hands to the glass.

"We might volunteer for Hungary," continued Clement, grimly, "and that'll be a dog's life."

Their speeches did not voice half the fury of their wretchedness, their misery, their rage: they were sunk in a humiliation, an agony that was too deep for any words or gestures to express. Madelon gazed down the disordered table at the tense figure of her father—a gaunt, heavy, bent figure, like a bird of prey starving in a waste—a tragic symbol of defeat and shame.

"He relied on me," thought Madelon. "All of them relied on me, and I have failed them: they spent their all on me for nothing."

The door opened slowly, partially closed, and opened quietly again, and a Lutheran clergyman entered, and hesitated on the sill, dismayed and frightened by the scene before him—the tumbled cloth pulled awry, the four figures round it, sunk by some weight of woe onto their elbows and palms—for so they all held themselves, their faces in their hands, their arms on the table. The two young men in the gaudy uniforms—one green-faced, mottled, sick-seeming: the other with a scar creeping purple across his cheek as if it had been fresh made: the old man huddled, gaunt, in his place, and the girl in the great chair of honour, small, frail, like a cowering child.

The pastor, contemplating this scene, did not dare move. He knew something of his errand, Major General von Neitschütz had confided to him a wide hint of the importance of his mission. He had the marriage-service by rote: he had done exactly as he was bid, disturbed no one, come through the open gates, the open door, straight to this imposing room: a little awed, a little excited, curious to see the Elector: apprehensive yet flattered by his interference in these secret State affairs; a thin, fair, earnest man of middle age and decent aspect, he stood on the threshold absorbed in his awed curiosity, forgetting even his errand, but merely gazing at these four figures.

"My lord, sir," began the minister—the words faded on his lips, he cleared his throat. Again he tried:

"Major General von Neitschütz—"

It was Madelon who answered him: she turned in her chair, and, for the first time since he had entered the room, he beheld her face.

He had never seen her so close before, and until he died, many, many years afterwards, he never forgot that lovely countenance, and often spoke of it—sometimes with compassion and sometimes with horror, but always with a trembling admiration.

Madelon looked over her shoulder and stared at him.

Her fairness outlined against the bronze darkness of the candlelight: her scarf had fallen, a needless descent now, and her shoulders and bosom were bare.

"We shall not need you tonight," she said quietly, "there has been some error—I am sorry."

The pastor bowed and backed from the room, but still stared at Madelon's face. As he did so he observed behind her, and above the branch of candles, the proud escutcheon of the House of Neitschütz that he had so often admired and even humbly and distantly envied, and he remarked with horror how it was blurred and veiled with dark, and dripped with moisture, red and black—like soot and blood, like darkness and flame, like sin and death.

Her eyes impelled him to speak, though the three silent figures of the men filled him with terror and apprehension: and she seemed (and always in his recollection of her) like a fair creature doomed.

"It is a fearful night," he stammered, "a great storm comes up over the fields, but it does not rain."

"A fearful night," said Madelon.

He left them; he closed the door; he crept away, glad to return to his homely hearth through the thunderous dark.

The girl spoke down the table:

"Father, have we nothing that we can do? We have relied entirely on this?"

"We have nothing," he replied, hoarsely. "I staked entirely on this. I have spent and spent, Madelon; God knows the

straits I was put to, even for tonight, to feed his lackeys in our kitchen. They eat—what we shall lack next week."

Madelon smiled slowly:

"What did he say, Father? Did you hear, my father, what he said? 'Not the first harlot to come from an ancient house!' "

"O God, my God!" groaned Neitschütz, "he must die, we must kill him, Casimir."

Madelon considered them all curiously.

"I believe," she thought, "I could rouse them up to murder tonight—I believe I could rouse myself to murder too. I am so changed. I could stand at the door and hold it while they did it—and afterwards—the torture chamber in the Koenigsberg . . . the rack, the wheel—"

"Let him live," she said aloud, "to serve our ends. Do you think he is free of me, even now? His torment is little less than ours while he waits."

"Do you still think," sneered Casimir, "that you will enchant him?"

"It is," whispered Madelon, "it is because he loves me that he is so furious, he spoke in agony. Ah, Casimir"—this was the only reproach she had addressed to her brother—"had you not played such a fool's trick I had been sure of him indeed."

Clement jerked towards her across the table oversetting a rummer of red wine, of which neither of them took any heed.

"Perhaps, even now," he muttered, "you might, supposing his senses were stirred enough—"

"He is married," said Madelon. "Count Stürm has seen to that. Believe me, when he knew he was coming to Arnsdorf, Count Stürm saw to it that that marriage ceremony had been completed in Anspach."

The three of them, even her father, were looking to her now, relying on her judgment and decision; she was the coolest of them all, like a little light of hope in a smoky darkness.

"Shut the window," she bade Casimir, "even if we choke and stifle in the heat, I'll not endure this lightning."

Casimir rose and clumsily clattered the shutters together; the candles were guttering, flaring with the stench of coarse fat.

"Despite it all," said Madelon, "his very heart's core aches for me."

"How to get out," snarled Clement, "how to get out of this."

"There are no doors in hell," smiled Madelon.

"I'll shoot myself," swore Casimir, "before this story flies round Dresden . . ."

"The hour for our deliberation goes fast," said Madelon. "Hush! we must be quiet and wise."

"We have nothing to deliberate," replied her father.

"No." Madelon rose, could rise, even from this. "I could so counter-move that he, his wife, Count Stürm, and all their creatures, all who have brought this about and who have hated us, should be the subject for our mirth."

"How?" demanded Neitschütz, hoarsely, "how, girl, how could you accomplish this?"

They all looked at her, waiting, half in expectation, half in horror.

"What have we left to save?" mused Madelon, as if she had not heard her father's harsh fierce question. "We are degraded from all worldly honour, he could not hold us lower than he does. After all, is not this the game I have been always taught? Are not these the very rules that I have learnt so well?"

The thunder shook among them, the untended candles flared a ragged light on their intense and affrighted faces. The three men stared closer and closer at the girl who, standing, appeared to command them all.

"What do you mean?" whispered the old man, fearfully.

"He asked you to be your daughter's pander," said Madelon; "ask him then a pander's price. Tell him to come to my room, and be you there to bargain with him."

EIGHT

JOHANN GEORG endeavoured to control himself by listening for the continual roll of the thunder, which came with but a few seconds' interval, yet with every clap was more hushed. He had opened his window on the sable melancholy, the deep menace of the night; the stifling heat had been somewhat relieved; the air, though still sultry, seemed to hold a large and fair expectancy of rain.

The youth's spirits faltered and sank; he was oppressed by the dark night without and by the dark house within; not that he feared that these people whom he had so violently made his enemies might contrive something against him, for his courage was steadfast, and he never gave a thought to any possible personal peril. Vague sinister visions filled the hot oppressive night; it seemed to the young man that something wild and awful beyond the actual circumstances that had occurred, atrocious as these were, were abroad; a secret misgiving shook him, as if he had put his hand to unimaginable disaster and evil, and pulled down upon his head a thunder-cloud of curses and misfortune.

The night was ugly and ominous.

It seemed to Johann Georg that it was no longer still, that as he leant from his window he could hear hollow and eerie voices whispering on the terraces below, and then these voices faded into a low hiss or rustle—it might be the leaves stirring in the slight hot breeze. Then again, with a persistent impertinence, they were at his door, scoffing menaces, commenting on his actions, on his thoughts; yet the young man knew that there was no one there that he would ever see in human shape.

He looked about the room; it was very familiar to him, yet now invested with a manner of horror, as a dear place might be when revisited through the enchantment of a foul dream. He had often stayed here in his childhood and youth—it was the finest chamber in the house and an effort had been made to equip it with some taste; red damask, not too often mended, upon the bed; the bow-legged chairs industriously polished; girandoles either side the long dignified mirror, framed in gilt, hung about the dressing stand.

The young man's own handsome appointments his body-servant had already set about the chamber made even these careful luxuries seem poor.

Johann Georg fixed his eyes on these possessions of his own and endeavoured to remind himself vehemently and fiercely that he was a prince and a ruler. He recalled his father, who had been a fine soldier; the first man to plant the Christian flag in the Turkish camp. He reminded himself of all the matters and affairs there were in the world besides women, and of all the women there were besides Magdalena Sibylla.

The curtains eddied inwards from the open window in a sudden gust of rising wind, and steadily, through the more distant mutter of the thunder, came the patter of the rain on the leaves of the great trees without. Johann Georg picked up his watch which, shaped like an egg of silver and crystal and attached to a long ribbon of blue velvet, lay among his toilet appointments. It was nearly an hour since he had left those four figures round the disordered supper-table beneath the stained escutcheon. For the first time in his life he noted how little time, as marked on clocks, mattered. If he had not glanced at the small silver dial he could not have said if the interval had been one hour, or two, or three, or all the night. The rain fell steadily into a blackness so complete that it seemed a void.

Now there was someone at the door, a human muffled step, a human muffled knock.

The Elector, who had bidden all his servants keep away from

him, opened the door and looked into the corridor, which was lit only by one small lamp.

The careful-faced servant handed him a letter—a small piece of paper folded over and sealed.

The Elector took it and closed the door, and returned to the window, where the night air, now wild and wet with rain, rushed about his ears. The candles were flaring in this same melancholy gust, and by the light of them the Elector broke the seal.

"From Madelon! And I shall scarce be able to read it for the trembling of her hand."

But, no! it was written steadily with a precise and flying pen.

I am in my room now and waiting for you here.

MADELON.

So easy, after all! A Neitschütz—and no more difficult than one of those creatures of whom Madame de Rosny had told him—creatures whom, in his passion for her, he had scarcely known to exist . . . he stood amazed, ashamed.

At once, within the hour . . .

The splashing of the rain had reminded him of the splashing of the water in that fountain long since dried up, where they had played together as children—the four of them: those two trim young men braced into their uniforms with their dissipated faces—they were little children then and pleasant playmates, but now vile cold hypocrites, as she was. . . .

He could remember the sundial, from which they used to scrape the moss, and the fluted pier with the urn on top, which stood beside the thickset hedge, and the hornbeam screen. Sometimes they had gone far afield beyond the path into the vineyard; he could recall the scent of the grape-flower in late spring; she would play on the old virginals, too, with the cracked withered garlands of flowers, he on a stool at her feet, half-rapt in the heavens, thinking of her as St. Cecilia, or an angel in paradise; he recalled her room, to which he was now

summoned and which he had never entered before, yet knew so exactly where it lay; he had often watched the windows, and the jasmine which climbed up there over the barren wall which boasted no other flower, the one scented bloom she had planted and watered. He had taken a slip to Moritzburg and it had died. With a fierce tenderness the young man looked back at these pictures, now to be relinquished for ever, as a child may look back for the last time on the toys which once amused him and that he must now despise, not without regret and a certain love and compassion for that other creature he was once, and that was so easily snatched into ecstasy by such flimsy trumpery.

"Who loses the most tonight—you or I? My high darling was but a sham. . . ."

The shadow and chill were already over him and brought his mind, embittered and distraught, almost to despair. If she could have stood out now! Some women, he knew, he surely knew, would sooner have died. But they were degraded—all the Neitschütz, when now he had so openly and atrociously insulted them, not one of them had responded! Like whipped hounds they had cowered . . . how was it possible they had allowed him to leave the room?

Here was her letter—steady, cool and clear. If he had married her, how soon would she have been sending such messages to other men?

He mused on the infamy of all of them; he raged to think how they must have laughed at him; he had been hoodwinked, even by his mother, blinded by cloudy fantasies; he could buy women, any woman, a Neitschütz; no one had told him that; how childish; how imbecile he had been . . . he had thought that marriage was hardly high enough for so fine, so admirable a creature, he had been humble before her loveliness, her accomplishments for he was slow, clumsy and ignorant, it had seemed almost an intolerable ecstasy that she should choose him—yet he could have had her, even as those two fearful hags had advised him that he, a Prince, could have any woman!

Johann Georg closed the window against the dashing on-

slaught of the rain, put out the candles, and so went into the corridor and, without hesitation, to her chamber.

He heard no sound from either his servants or those of the house, but lights, though mean and scarce, were put adroitly to illuminate his way.

At the door, before which he paused now, he had ventured once to lay flowers, when he was still young enough not to be ashamed of such folly. He could remember the painful care with which he had made up the bouquet—little buds and bells and trumpets, fine leaves, exactly arranged in circles of colour. Blue and yellow, white and rose. He glanced where the bouquet had lain, and turned the handle and entered the room which had once been to him like a shrine.

It was brightly lit—candles on the bureau and on the mantelshelf, and at the foot of the bed with the drawn-curtains sat her father and her two brothers, their bare swords across their knees.

"Ah, murder!" the young Elector exclaimed.

He closed the door, quite fearless, and glad of action, glad that he was to deal with the men who would arouse him from his hateful dreams into a robust passion of scorn and anger. He leant against the door, and set his hand on his hip, his feet wide apart and his shoulders back. He still wore his stars and orders, the blue of the Garter, and the black and white of the Eagles of Poland and Prussia. All this bravery served to increase his height—he appeared almost a gigantic man. He held high his bright head and scowled at them with a savage disdain. He scoffed at them grimly and the look was a bitter distortion on his young candid face. He believed they meant to murder him, but it never occurred to him to leave the room or call for help.

"What hazard do I stand here?" he asked.

The two officers rose out of instinctive respect for their prisoner, and some fear in the presence of a brave man. They retained their bare swords in their unsteady clutch.

The old Neitschütz remained seated, with both his swollen and knotted hands on the guard of his weapon. He had taken

off his heavy periwig and his hair, shaven close, showed like a gleam of hoarfrost on his large head. His yellow features were furrowed and shrunken, and his light brown eyes, that had once been of that gleaming golden hue, were but the ashes of extinguished fires. He had pulled his habit awry; his coat was open, his neck-cloth undone; his massive bulk, at once huge and gaunt, obscured the bed-curtains worked by Madelon's own hands which hung directly behind him.

"Your Highness," he mouthed in harsh, raucous tones, without looking up, "has treated me like a dog, and, like a dog, I come fawning to your feet."

"Is this a trap, or more hypocrisy?" asked the young Elector.

He advanced a step and faced them all, still with his hands on either side of his wide skirts, still without touching his sword. They could, had they had firearms concealed about them, have shot him—any one of them, as he stood there, and he knew it, but did not care.

"You have demanded my daughter," continued General von Neitschütz, thickly, "in such a way as, I think, no man's daughter was ever asked before."

"Do you resent it?" demanded the Elector, violently, "you who have spread birdlime for me since I was in petticoats?"

He was conscious, even as he spoke, of her room, defiled by this; the thought of this place had once been as sweet to him as open sunshine; he had envied the jasmine that waved at her window . . . the window from which she had often looked down at him, a supplicant below for her smiles.

General von Neitschütz grinned, lifted his gaunt, shaven head; there seemed to be a cast or twist in one of his eyes, and a wryness on one side of his features, he was as a man who had been paralyzed by a blow on the head or trepanned.

"I do not resent it," he stammered; "it is well known that this is the best fashion to catch the favour of Princes. . . . I, your Highness, have always been very unfortunate. . . . You know my shameful poverty, my long trouble. As you say, I

and my daughter and this house have been very long familiar to you. And," he added, with a ferocious wildness, "you ask me to give you my daughter—I tell you, your Highness, she is for sale."

"We stoop lower than we need, all of us," replied the Elector, sombrely, "you make this bargaining stink even in the devil's nostrils."

Clement von Neitschütz now spoke; it seemed indeed that his father was unable any longer to do so, for the old man swayed and groaned in his place.

"Why should we," he sneered savagely, "when your Highness has treated us as men without honour, friends or resources, behave in any manner grand and decorous? We are ruined, as you know, and we have nothing left to sell but this girl, and if you want her why should we lower the terms?"

"I will pay nothing—nothing!" cried the Elector, with fury. "All she will gain from me is that I shall leave you unmolested, blackguards that you are!"

"But life," cried Casimir, "is worth nothing to us on those conditions. Perhaps your Highness does not realize what it is for a man to be desperate. Here are our terms."

He pulled some papers out of his laced pocket-hole. "Until you sign them you do not get Madelon—even if we have to kill you where you stand."

Clement had, meanwhile, stepped adroitly behind the Elector and bolted the door; he was quick and clever at small tricks.

The Elector arrogantly refused to take the papers from Casimir or to move his hand from his side; he stood erect defying them.

With a bitter bow the younger Neitschütz proceeded to read aloud the terms. Money, pensions, employment, precisely stated, quietly and clearly defined—a business-like document.

"Who drew up those in so short a time?" demanded Johann Georg.

"Madelon herself, sir," replied Casimir; "she was the only one who had so clear a head, so steady a hand."

"Madelon," cried the Elector, "Madelon! We are all drunk, or damned, or in a dream. . . ."

"We're all drunk," grinned Clement, from the door. "Who could put this through sober?"

"Drunk or sober, I'll be your sport no more," flared Johann Georg. "I refuse to sign; I will pay you no price. Tomorrow you can come and ask my favours."

General von Neitschütz spoke:

"These are our terms. Does your Highness expect niceness or delicacy? You have treated me like a dog," he repeated, "my God, like a dog!"

"My terms were stated first," cried the Elector in an open fury—"the woman tonight or tomorrow—ruin for all of you! I shall lift no hand against you, it will be sufficient to leave you to your own coils."

He turned his back on the two by the bed and made an arrogant gesture for Clement von Neitschütz to leave the door. He believed that they would all attack him—they were desperate to the point of murder, and he rejoiced that it might be so. He was willing to fight them all, and confident that he could defeat them all . . . the old broken disabled man, who could hardly hold himself on his feet, who must sit there groaning and struggling for the breath with which to voice his infamous sentences—the two young men, soft and slack from vicious living, he could strive with them all. And, more than this, he felt in himself something grand and generous that would annihilate them all to the filth to which they belonged; he repeated his passionate order to Clement to step aside.

"Your Highness leaves?" said a woman's voice.

He turned swiftly.

The bed curtains had parted behind Neitschütz's old bowed figure, and there was Madelon, bright against the warm shadows, kneeling against the wooden bedpost, in a night rail of muslin, her hair fallen to its natural length.

"Do you go away, after all?" she asked.

She looked at him across the candlelight as if they were alone

in the chamber; he was conscious of the sound of the rain, heavy, steady without.

He took a step back towards the bed, and the three swords quivered in his direction upwards, towards his heart; even old Neitschütz had got to his feet now and stood there squarely and resolutely confronting him with the drawn weapon; the candle-light flickered on the blue steel.

"Except you sign . . ." they all said together.

The young Elector looked without a tremor at the menacing faces and the threatening forms.

"I made my bargain downstairs," he replied hotly, and folded his arms across his breast.

"Am I worth so little?" asked Madelon; she pulled the curtains farther apart. "Ah, me, so little!"

"It is your infamy and my shame," broke in the Elector passionately, "that you are worth nothing, Madelon."

But he spoke in defiance of himself, for the ancient enchantment was returning.

She was so sweet, so cool, so infantile, so remote from all this squalid horror, this pitiful evil, that she seemed to flash him into other worlds, to lift his disgusted and outraged soul into peace—and this, though she was the cause of all the horror and the tumult.

"Am I not worth something to you even yet?" asked Madelon in a still voice. "I who was once your young dear and your sweet darling? Give my father what he asks, and let them go and leave us together."

Madelon stepped from the bed, half-unclothed and glowing in the candle-light; he had not known she was so beautiful. . . .

"The storm has passed," she smiled, looking at him as if the others were not there; "and tomorrow will be a fair day, fresh and pleasant after the rain. If you were to leave me now, my love, it would not seem so sweet to you."

The young Elector was breathing heavily, unevenly; his face was hotly flushed; again the sweat started on his brow and lip;

he heard the level beat of the rain sweet, monotonous, enchanting.

"I will sign nothing," he muttered desperately, "nothing; I will promise nothing."

His bright blue eyes, blood-injected, met the pallid, malign glance of Casimir, the cold and bitter fury of Clement, and, more deadly than either, the blank stare of the old man still seated at the end of the bed.

He thought they all looked insanely wicked, and evil, and terrible. He kept his arms folded above his breast, above his labouring heart; his was a splendid yet pitiful figure in his glittering silk and gleaming decorations, with his bright hair and candid good looks, so young, strong, and powerful, so defeated and miserable.

"Come to me!"

Her voice was fine and delicate in the ugly din and confusion of his thoughts. He stared at the bed with the embroidered curtains—he could remember seeing her work them by the fountain and the fluted pillar with the urn; remembered her little basket of silks, and the neat knotted cords with all the niceties of a woman's minute labours.

She leant against the bed-board, her light garments falling open, and slipping from her shoulders, and made a little gesture of her hand forward, and then said to the three men, who appeared with a bitter, hard, desperate and cynical patience to await her commands:

"Put up your swords and leave him to me."

As her father stumbled to his feet, she added:

"I will get your papers signed before the morning."

"I can't move—I can't go," groaned General von Neitschütz, "I've had a stroke or a palsy, my legs won't move."

"Take him away," she said to her brothers; "he is well enough, it is but stress of mind."

The two young officers put their swords into their scabbards, without looking either to the Elector, who remained standing in

the centre of the floor, or at their sister, who remained leaning against the bedboard.

They helped, half-dragging, half-supporting, their father from the room.

Casimir had left the papers which he had offered to the Elector on the bed covelet. Madelon picked them up and slipped them under the pillow, moving easily, lightly, with bare feet.

"How violent the rain is!" she said, quietly.

They could hear nothing else but that steady sound beyond the window.

Relieved of the odious presence of the men, the young Elector drew an easier breath. With a stumbling step he crossed the room and, avoiding the chairs that had been occupied by the Neitschütz—father and sons—he took a taboret by the dressing-table, and sat down, pulling aside the curtains from the rainy night. The shutters had been set wide, and the atmosphere of the chamber was cool and sweet.

"You are perturbed," said Madelon, gently; "tonight has overthrown all of us. But why need we be so changed one to the other?" She approached him. "See, I have sent them away—we are alone together. I make no bargains with you; I ask for nothing—we are entirely in your hands."

He looked at her—the Madelon of his long adoration—and the miserable becloudings of rage and disillusion left his senses.

"What has there been between you and me," she asked, "that you should wrong me as you did—what if I wrote desperately to a brother who tormented me with his misfortunes? Did you not set me too low in what you said tonight? I am still Madelon."

He became ashamed of his violence, of his brutality as he gazed at her sorrowful, candid face, so pure in line, so radiant in colouring, with an expression of such resigned suffering. He wished to go on his knees and ask her pardon for the wrong he had done her—the foul and unforgivable words with which he

had branded her. He wished to wash away with tears all the frightful visions of this horrid night.

Madelon took from her dressing-table, which was set with flowers in tall glasses, a green flagon and a small rummer, and poured him out some liquid and offered it to him. It was, she said, a cordial she had made herself—new wine and spices.

Johann Georg drank it. Through the fatigue of his emotions and his passions, the shape of the flagon and the glass were impressed on his mind, the colour and the line of them; the taste of the liquid seemed to him peculiar—but he dismissed the thought from his mind as swiftly as it had come.

He remembered, however, afterwards and often enough.

The drink which was both sweet and potent gave him back something of the composure that he had lost when the three men had left the room and he had been relieved from the strain of facing them. He pulled Madelon down towards him. He asked himself why he had been so agonized—what had he wanted but Madelon? And she but him? It did not matter in what way or what fashion. The dream maiden of his folly had vanished but the earthly woman remained; they could not take her from him . . . here was definite joy and repose and oblivion in the lovely sad face of Madelon, in the yielding soft body of Madelon, in her delicate bosom and curved shoulders, in her little feet and hands . . . he had been cheated of everything else, but not of this. What if she had laughed at him? She would not laugh tonight . . . she was more beautiful than he had dared to imagine, silver white as the moon between the wisps of muslin . . . her locks were so long they curled on his knee as he held her; he had so often anticipated this moment in his thoughts . . . sometimes, when hunting, he had wandered away into a glade with dead leaves under foot and young leaves overhead and felt ichor in his veins, as he thought of Madelon, been so maddened with surges of passion that he had flung himself down on the warm earth and shuddered because Madelon was not in his arms.

Now he possessed her; she was surrendered to him; she leant

against him; her cool fingers touched his hot face glistening with damp.

He snatched her hands and kissed them, half weeping, and begged her never to leave him, to remain with him through everything. He could not tell her what she meant to him—without her he was unhappy—with her he was happy. That was all! How express the felicity of her enchantment? He could not now believe that she was a hypocrite and traitor to him.

If she was, he scarcely cared.

Intoxicated with passion, with remorse, with wine, and an old sadness, he caught her to his bosom.

Madelon stretched from his arms to take up the snuffers and put out the candles in the girandole on the toilet table. Then, in the half dark, she gently fumbled for and unclasped his stars and crosses from his neck; they were pressing into her bare bosom.

"I am cold," sobbed Madelon, shuddering in the wet night wind from the open window.

He lifted her and carried her to bed; how easily he could do this—she would not laugh at him when she realized how strong he was.

Madelon's arms clung to his neck, her fingers twined in his hair . . . almost he was happy; how many barren nights had he not passed, restless with inordinate desire for her, believing her unattainable save through the severest sacrifices, how often had he groaned and bitten his pillow and thought the darkness sparkled with the mocking gleam of her fine shape!—and now all these desires might be appeased; he coaxed, praised and soothed her. She felt his warm hands on her shoulders and entreated him to put out what remained of the lit candles, for there was yet enough light for her to see the fair hair, and hot red face and the thick firm throat where he had pulled his collar and his shirt neck open; he stumbled to his feet from the bed step to obey her; he had to make fumbling passes with an unsteady hand before he could accomplish what he would be at; but in a little the dark was about them; Madelon, feeling his arms

round her again and his desperate kisses on her bosom, stared across his bent head in this darkness (filled with the beat of the rain) and smiled horribly that she might not shriek, then closed her eyes and still could not shut out the unsubstantial outline of another man's face.

NINE

Below, the three men sat beneath the blotted escutcheon, which they no longer noticed; the two sons talked rapidly together, the old man was silent, leaning on the table.

Clement rose frequently to snuff the candles or to extinguish those which had burnt to the sockets; the rain made a heavy sound on the hard stone terrace without; Casimir was very drunk; he spilled half of every glass he poured, he retched, and blubbered at the lips, his hair was dark with the sweat on his brow, his eyes swollen above and beneath; his speech was a continuous muttering, mostly curses on the two infernal witches, he swore they were no less, who had sold his letters.

Clement was more sober; he could, at a crisis, so far command himself; he tried to put some gloss on the matter; he dabbed at his face with a napkin, for his wound had broken into little beads of blood and burnt fiercely; he assured himself, now and then, that his sword was at his side; he was afraid of the strength and violence of the young man upstairs; Casimir was incapable of holding a weapon, and the old man ruined, eh, it behoved him to look after himself. . . .

Neitschütz stirred and spoke:

"Last time I was in church, the sermon . . . I recall . . . he said . . . the thirty pieces of silver valueless . . . the body of the innocent . . . beyond all price."

Clement thought he raved, and answered with dismal scorn:

"We can call it a marriage—a contract before witnesses, we might even upset that other. Who knows? I believe that she has such an empire over him that everything is possible. It can be brazened out. No one will be more surprised than Count Stürm—that's almost worth it, eh, sir? Think of his cursed face!"

He and Casimir shuddered as they spoke, and looked at each other furtively, and now and again gave their father a livid glance; Casimir drank continuously, but even he could not bemuse his brains from that one thing which they beheld with such harsh clarity.

Once the old man turned in his chair, and muttered:

"A woman of her breeding!"

Casimir caught his cuff and stammered, thickly:

"There were things against me that I could not have faced without the money—people to buy off; you would have been disgraced in me if not in her—"

Frightened by his ghastly look, the two pressed their father to drink, too, but he gave them a scowling refusal; he plucked at his lips restlessly, and his grey eyebrows went up and down; his lips opened and shut over his ugly teeth.

"Whoever played a hazard like this? After all, she may lose him . . . when he is satiated—"

Casimir drank himself into a stupor, drowsed, and fell from his chair to the floor with a crash that did not rouse the others, and lay stretched out, groaning, half-hidden by the dragged table-cloth; his neat grey uniform, his tumbled red sash, his bright braid and tangled hair were shown in the tawny light of the guttering candles, which Clement now and then still carefully snuffed. For he remained coldly sober, and tapped with cool finger tips the long bleeding scar that the wine had caused to burn like branding across his face.

Father and son sat at the table without speaking until the dawn showed through the chinks of the shutters. Then Clement opened the window wide on to a rain-washed sky of pearly rose that shamed the frightful disorder of the room.

"Go up," said Neitschütz, livid in this tender light; "we might even yet kill him." He roused himself with painful trembling from his bitter vigil.

Clement wiped his lips.

"Too late, eh? This has played havoc with you, sir."

General von Neitschütz did not reply.

"We'll make him pay," said Clement; he left the room and went steadily upstairs.

The house was very quiet, still vexed with twilight. He opened every window he passed, and felt amazed at the freshness of the morning, the sound of the birds, and the delicate azure of the early heavens; these sights and sounds made him feel stupid.

At his sister's door he steadied himself; he was giddy, he supposed, from lack of sleep.

There was no sound from within the chamber; Clement's plump, white hand travelled slowly over the door. He tapped, softly, but with no hesitation; he waited; he tapped again. The bolt was slipped, the door opened, almost immediately.

Madelon stood in front of him, and he avoided her eyes, and looked away down the shadowed corridor.

But, as she did not speak but stood motionless before him, he sought to turn and peep, not at her, but beyond her into the room. He saw the Elector's ribbons and crosses and ornaments scattered across a chair and fallen on the floor, and between the embroidered bed-curtains pulled hastily aside, he saw the golden hair of the Elector on the tumbled pillow.

"You came for these?" asked Madelon; he looked at her slyly; she wore a long gown of white dimity; as she held it together at the chin it fell straight as a shroud to her bare feet.

She put a packet of folded papers into his greedy hand and closed the door on his face.

Clement eagerly turned over the papers—each one was signed —Johann Georg—Johann Georg—Johann Georg—in a large and trembling scrawl . . . even in this half light he could see that.

Security—wealth—honour—and authority . . . Clement von Neitschütz took the guarantees of these downstairs and laid them before his father, who, rigid and haggard, faced the pure dawn.

At Casimir, still hideously asleep, at Major General von Neitschütz clutching the papers, Clement von Neitschütz smiled.

TEN

When Delphicus de Haverbeck returned to the depot of the Life Guards he heard that Steffani, the old Maestro, had been enquiring for him.

"I'll see him tomorrow," said the soldier; and he gave orders that if the old man came again that evening he was to be denied his presence. "I'll have this night to myself."

He spent it alone in his room, disturbed by the thunderstorm. He took out his book and set himself mathematical problems, and drew the designs of a fort with bastions, ramparts, counterscarps and demi-lunes, and set himself to take this citadel. He drew and measured precisely.

"I will not think of it, I will not be put out of my way by her, by any other woman. I have nothing to offer compared with Saxony—she is in Saxony's arms by now—and I, I must not care."

Books failed him and he went to the small harpsichord that he kept in the corner of his room, and played a little piece of his own composition, which he had entitled *Rondo alla Turca,* and which he had copied from the sounds of the heathen patrols when he had camped near them in the Hungarian marshes, tuck of drum, coming nearer through the hot night.

He would leave the Saxon service, so corrupt, so disheartening, and enter that of, perhaps, Venice . . . eh, the carnival, he would like to see the carnival at Christmas, that might help him to forget Madelon. . . . Before his mind there was the picture of the Koenigsberg which he had seen as he had ridden away from Arnsdorf, rising up a black bulk into the threatening sky, struck across so fiercely by that blade of lightning.

"Yes, she was my love, my happiness, and I have lost her—she was my greatest good fortune and she has been forgone."

His keen, eager mind slipped from his mathematics and his music, his skilful fingers went instinctively from one note to another, he was not attending to the melodies that he made from the black and yellow keys.

"I admire Saxony for marrying her; this pain will not so soon be overlaid, this passion not so soon laid into lassitude, but they must be endured."

Delphicus de Haverbeck did not believe that there was anything he could not endure—the foundation of his character was a manly fortitude.

He could not hope to sleep tonight, and he was glad of the thunder which gave him the excuse for his own wakefulness. He might sit at his harpsichord or his military plans, he might pace up and down the room, or open the windows and look upon the storm dark above the city lights; he might laugh at himself with irony, he might argue with himself with exasperated patience, never could he take from his mental vision those pictures of the old bleak château of Arnsdorf, where the one jasmine, tended by Madelon, planted by Madelon, climbed to her window; of the fountain where they had sailed paper boats and he had watched them, of the walks once so trim; of the old library, the old virginals, how he had watched her fair head bent above her work, of a thousand airy trifles that would not be forgotten.

In the morning Haverbeck learnt that the old Italian had come again, and had gone away sorrowful on being denied. He had forgotten Steffani, and heard without concern that he had been sent away. It was so easy to make amends to the old man.

Haverbeck went through his duties carefully and thought that he had his heart quiet and his nerves steady. By mid-morning he was in the streets of Dresden; they seemed clear and fresh after the rain and were full of people going eagerly about their business. Haverbeck remembered the important lace head-dress he had promised Angelique. He always bought his laces and his linen himself, and he turned now towards the shop where the coveted finery had been noticed, hanging coquettishly on a grace-

ful stand. He crossed the market-place and in a street of shops that sold lace entered his own particular magazine and purchased a head of Brussels, which Angelique had admired some weeks before. His account there was high, and he smiled as the obsequious woman who sold him the lace reminded him of it. He had too many debts, but he did not believe they were beyond his ability to pay. He had always kept his fortune well in hand and, though hampered by a poor estate and harassed by the need of keeping up a splendid appearance (being besides most open-handed and benevolent in his disposition) he had yet contrived to be not hopelessly entangled nor embarrassed in his affairs. He bought now a pair of ruffles for himself, two lengths of lace for a cravat that Angelique's neat fingers should sew up, and signed an order on his bankers for the payment of all these and the money he owed besides. He had decided that he would leave Dresden and Saxony and take his sword to the Empire. He had lingered too long on that hazard of fortune which might give him Madelon. But that cast had been made and gone against him; now he was a free man, free even of hope in that direction, and might take his fortune where he would, but it would not be in Dresden under Johann Georg, the young Elector, who would be the husband of Madelon.

So the young soldier smiled and was amiable as he chose his laces, putting one pattern against this, being particular in his judgment, thinking the while of the war on the Eastern frontiers of the Empire, and how a lively and enterprising man might easily get promotion there and in not a long time, either. He decided when he had bought his laces he would go at once to Count Stürm and give in his resignation from the Saxon army. The head-dress for Angelique he took with him and thrust into his pocket, for he meant to give it to her himself—both as a greeting and as a parting gift, for he did not intend to take the young dancer with him to Vienna; he had no obligations towards Angelique, who had come lightly and easily to him, and without bargaining; but he intended to protect her until she found another lover, or returned to the Comedy.

When he left the lace shop where mistress and maid alike, because of his handsome face and pleasant ways, tried to make him linger, it was past midday, and Haverbeck, turning into a coffee-shop, found the *Gazette* already laid about the tables. He took it up and again read the announcement of the Elector's marriage which had caught his attention so strongly yesterday.

Then he turned almost immediately to the notices of the war, and read with a certain fierce pleasure that affairs were not so well there and that Kemal Pasha was advancing dangerously near to Vienna, and the Imperial family at Laxenburg were in something of a fright.

Haverbeck drank his coffee, smoked a pipe, and went directly to the Residenzschloss. Count Stürm had not been so friendly with him since he had presented that memorial about the army. However, he saw the soldier immediately, for he could not afford to flout him, and he was, besides, in a good mood, having heard from a flying post that morning that the marriage by proxy of Johann Georg IV and the Margravine of Anspach had taken place and that the lady was on her way to Dresden. Count Stürm had, therefore, secured his policy, his place, his person, and had considerably enjoyed seeing the vexed faces and forlorn figures of Sir William Colt and Spanheim, the English and Imperial envoys. The minister had taken a good deal of pleasure, also, in thinking about the keen and bitter discomfiture of the Neitschütz family—particularly of that old, sour, bitter man, who had hated him so well and struggled against him for so long.

The minister had a very luxurious set of apartments in the rambling pile of the ancient Residenzschloss; they had been given to him by his late master, and looked out at the side of the building, which was old, rough, and gaunt (a fortress of the Middle Ages, in parts rebuilt), on to a side street, away from the noise and clatter of the constant comings and goings in the great court of honour. Count Stürm, who had a nice and fine taste, had furnished these apartments very well, with pictures of the Flemish school, and Chinese cabinets on ormolu

stands, screens of lacquer, and Persian carpets. He was wrapped in a fur-lined coat and deep in a full-cushioned chair, for though it was now full summer, he was always cold and chilly in his blood, and an old and a sick man who suffered constant pain.

The soldier sat down opposite the long marquetry table on which, on a velvet cushion, worked with the arms of Ferdinand Stürm, slept poor Pug, the monkey, with the silver belt round his waist.

Haverbeck asked pardon for his peremptory demand for an interview.

"Sir, I do not believe I shall trouble you much longer in any matter whatever. The truth is I am confoundedly discontented, and I wish to offer my resignation from the Elector's army."

Count Stürm attempted no subterfuge with the young man.

"You are not satisfied with your rate of promotion?"

"My memorial," smiled Haverbeck, "has told you all the matters on which I am not satisfied."

"You are ambitious?" nodded the minister.

"I intend to join the Duke of Lorraine and help to keep back the Turk, at least. Those are my ambitions, sir. A life of action and of honour."

"Could you not lead a life of action and a life of honour as Major General in the Saxon forces?" asked Count Stürm.

"Not, sir, unless extensive reforms are undertaken in the army; and you yourself are not interested in these, and the young Elector, I believe, not capable of making them. And if he should make them I do not think it very likely that I shall find my count therein."

"Well," admitted the minister, wiping his lips carefully with a long fine handkerchief, "you know perfectly well that the Elector is committed to neutrality."

"I know," thought Haverbeck, "that you are paid very handsomely to maintain that neutrality."

He bent his dark head and made no reply.

"The Elector," continued the minister, with a touch of insolence, "if he is of a warlike disposition, must spend his ardour,

as you propose to spend yours, my dear General, in fighting the heathen on the Danube, or may be the Bosphorus, Saxony will not put an army in the field to help the Allies, and certainly cannot put an army against them, so, for a gentleman of martial temperament, I think you have decided well."

Haverbeck rose. There was nothing more for him to say, and there was a certain relief that this was off his mind, and that his decision had been made and accepted. He walked to the window where he had put his hat, with the cockade and the buckle of the Life Guards on the leaf, and his long gloves on a chair in this recess. Count Stürm, huddled in the cushioned chair, watched him keenly, considered his exceptional good looks, the indolent grace of his person, which yet could be easily commanding and formidable; he knew something, too, of the young man's ability and resolution, decision of character and unbendable courage, and he thought: "It is stupid of me to allow him to go to Vienna with any ill will towards myself—who knows, if, within a few years, he may not be of great influence at the Imperial court?"

And Stürm cast about in his alert and subtle mind how he might please or oblige the young soldier.

Haverbeck, glancing from the window, said:

"Here come the Elector's outriders!"

And Stürm could hear the clatter of the horses in the narrow street.

"He is returning from Arnsdorf," murmured the minister, smiling behind his handkerchief.

"Did you know that he was at Arnsdorf?" asked Haverbeck quickly over his shoulder.

"Certainly I did," nodded Stürm, and rose—he knew not on what impulse of curiosity—and came to the window also.

Haverbeck wondered at this reply. How was it possible that Stürm could have known of that visit to Arnsdorf which implied a secret marriage and the overthrow of all his schemes?

Stürm peered into the shadowed street which was not very far below his windows. It pleased him, in an odd sort of way,

to be thus near the life of the city, and when his affairs were over and his meditations free of weighty matters, to sit at that window and watch the common life of the people, coming and going below.

The Electoral coach swept past, Haverbeck could see it clearly; a shaft of sunlight gleamed on the arms of Saxony on the side, the Electoral barret across the black and gold; they could see, too, in an instantaneous flash, the Elector inside, his orders and jewels, his bright gold hair, his light summer cloak falling back from his shoulders, and a woman seated beside him—Magdalena Sibylla—in a dark green riding hood, which she was holding at the throat, and across her knee a large bouquet of white and yellow roses. Haverbeck looked at her without bitterness. He thought: "May she be happy and fortunate in all her undertakings."

He could not, for a moment, speak; and he felt more shaken than ever he had when he had passed through fire, and heard the guns in his ears, the bullets whizz past his hair, seen his friends fall about him, and known all the undecided horror of a bloody battle . . . he was absorbed in his own sad thoughts; he did not therefore notice the stunned amazement of the man at his side, nor think of any of the consequences of the presence of that woman with the young Elector.

He took up his hat and his gloves and was turning away when he noticed Count Stürm leaning against the window place and staring in front of him, as if he were looking at some disastrous event, miles away, instead of the mere walls of the house opposite.

"Why, sir, is your Excellency taken with some trouble?" he exclaimed, knowing the minister's ill health, and fearing that some fit was upon him.

Count Stürm did, indeed, seem scarcely able to stand, and caught the young officer's arm, and begged him to lead him back to the table, and when he was there, sank to his chair and asked for his drops.

He indicated where they were and waited in a white patience while Haverbeck gave them to him, gently and carefully enough,

then caressed Pug in silence, and would not speak, while Haverbeck watched him, frowning and anxious, and wondering whether this was a stroke of nature or some intrigue to do with Madelon.

It seemed to him now as if it must be that the Elector had deceived him—as he thought indeed at first he had—by going to Arnsdorf secretly, that though Count Stürm had known of this visit he had not known of the purpose of it; it was not for him, Haverbeck, to give away their confidence by saying they were married—Count Stürm must know that by now; they were riding publicly through Dresden in the Electoral coach—hardly in a more public way could the Elector have announced his union, and Haverbeck applauded his courage.

"You saw them?" asked Count Stürm, shivering.

The soldier replied:

"Yes, I saw them, sir."

"He had a woman with him. Surely, surely, it was Magdalena Sibylla von Neitschütz?"

"Surely and indeed it was she," replied Haverbeck, steadily. "And did you not expect to see her? You say you knew he went to Arnsdorf last night?"

Count Stürm did not reply; he looked very oddly at Haverbeck. The drops had sent a little livid colour on to his high cheekbones, and he drummed nervously with his dry fingers on the table.

"What do you know of this?" he asked at last, sharply and harshly.

Haverbeck replied instantly and with some arrogance:

"I know nothing that you cannot guess, sir."

A lackey opened the door softly, and announced:

"His Highness the Elector."

"I will not see him," said Haverbeck, with a touch of agitation in his manner; "indeed I will not see him now; suffer me to retire until he has gone."

Count Stürm said:

"There is a closet behind that screen. You may wait there if you will."

For he had instantly thought that he might have some use for the young soldier.

Haverbeck went behind the screen and closed the door. The closet was small and richly furnished with books. Haverbeck flung himself into a chair and pulled down one of the volumes; it chanced to be Boileau's *Satires,* and he endeavoured to plunge himself into the stinging bitter sentences to keep his mind quiet until he might leave the Residenzschloss. The door was thick and he could not overhear the conversation between the Elector and Count Stürm, nor did he endeavour to do so. His desire now was to be clear of the whole affair, to mingle in none of their loves or hates, policies or designs; he made a strong effort to keep himself cool and steady. And succeeded.

The minister rose on his master's entry; Johann Georg motioned him back to his chair, and himself took that which Haverbeck had recently vacated.

Count Stürm stared at the Elector with an apprehension he could scarcely disguise; the youth appeared flushed and excited, at once triumphant and defiant, embittered and elated. He seemed in some way coarsened, and inclined to be provocative in his manners. He thrust himself back in his chair with a parade of arrogance that was not without insolence, and glittered in the early afternoon sunshine in taffeta coat and orders, chains, and crudely bright yellow hair.

Count Stürm, who always believed in carrying the assault into the enemy's camp, said:

"I have to inform your Highness that you have been married by proxy to the Margravine of Anspach; she will arrive in Dresden in two or three days."

"Very well," said the Elector, sullenly, thrusting his hands into his pockets.

"It is very well?" breathed Count Stürm.

"For me," smiled Johann Georg, "it is very well indeed. I hope the Margravine will like Dresden."

"Has your Highness any commands for me?" asked Count Stürm, steadily, affronting his fate.

"Yes, I have some commands for you," replied the Elector in tones of authority that he had never used before to his father's minister. "Marshal Pollnitz will be retired from his post which he is altogether incapable of holding, and Major General von Neitschütz will be appointed to the command of the army—"

"Ah," said the minister, grinning at Pug.

The loud young voice continued:

"The post of Chamberlain will be given to his son, Captain Clement von Neitschütz of the Life Guards. His brother, Casimir von Neitschütz will be promoted to be a General in the Cavalry—see that this is all done on the instant—this afternoon I give an audience to Sir William Colt and Count Spanheim; and I will not see M. de Rébénec as has been arranged."

Ferdinand Stürm caressed his sleeping monkey with a thin, white and unsteady hand.

The Elector rose with the air of a man who, having delivered a round volley of shot, and laid low his opponent, has done his work, and may retire.

"And I have provided a Lady of Honour for the Electress," he added. "Magdalena Sibylla von Neitschütz takes up her duties immediately. You will see that a set of apartments in the Residenzschloss is prepared for her reception."

He stood straddling, defiant, his hands on his hips.

"That's clear, isn't it? Have you anything to say?"

"It is absolutely clear," sneered Count Stürm, "and I have nothing to say, except, possibly, your Highness might like to know that Major General de Haverbeck has resigned from your forces."

"If he had not I should have cashiered him," replied the Elector, and strode away, heavy and glittering, sullen and excited, slamming the doors, knocking the pages out of his way.

Count Stürm at once hobbled across the room, opened the closet door, and called out Haverbeck, who squared his shoulders, dropped his book, and followed into the other room.

"He made his announcement, eh? She is his wife?"

"No, by God! it's worse than that," cried Stürm, "she's his mistress!"

Haverbeck flushed violently, like one who has been struck heavily over the heart.

"Ay, his mistress," repeated Stürm, too angry to notice the other's distress. "Who would have foreseen that stroke, who would have foretold that blow? I had never credited such diabolical cunning on the part of Neitschütz! I should have thought of it," he continued, embittered with self-reproach, "I might have known a man like that, and those two vicious brothers, that there is nothing such people will not do when driven desperate, the Neitschütz with their pride, their ancient house . . . My God! they'll be like furies . . ."

"Mistress, did you say?" broke in Haverbeck. "But you're mistaken, they're married."

"Married!" cried the minister, violently; "he went to Arnsdorf with a letter she had written making a mock of him—her cursed brother's epistles—and his own letter which that damned Casimir had pledged with the hag Rosny. He went to break with all of them, to tell her that he had discovered her. But she's got him after all—I should have seen that, the sly she-devil, she'll have him body and soul. Clever and well-trained, hard and a wanton —I'd better have let him marry her!"

But still Haverbeck could not credit this enormity.

"Magdalena Sibylla von Neitschütz the Elector's mistress!" he repeated. "How do you know?"

"How do I know?" replied Stürm, exasperated by this incredulity. "Didn't you see them driving through the street together just now? He has not repudiated the marriage with the Margravine, and he has promoted her father and her brothers to the highest commands in the army, and the household, and she is to have at once a suite of apartments in the Residenzschloss—at once. He is to see Colt and Spanheim this afternoon. She has twisted his policies round already—he'll be a fool to her least nod—"

He stopped, struggling for control. Never in all his difficult and intricate life had he been so amazed, so alarmed, so overwhelmed.

Haverbeck did not hear what the infuriated minister said, he was deep in his own thoughts, in his own visions. He pondered, slowly:

"She must have been very driven, or has she always been that manner of woman? They sold her, of course."

"She sold herself, you mean," snarled Count Stürm; "she dominates those three men—and now she'll dominate Saxony; the devil help us all!"

"She meant to marry him," insisted Haverbeck faintly; "that was her intention, her hope."

"Yes, and when she saw it was blasted she chose the other way; she'll have a stronger hold on him now. If she were his wife he would always have felt that he had condescended and paid too high for her. Now, she'll be able to throw in his face what she's lost for him. I'd rather have dealt with her as Electress than as mistress! If only I could have guessed this I might have let them marry! I tell you, she'll have him not only through his senses but through his mind. She's clever, clever, and trained."

"She sold herself," thought Haverbeck, in anguish, "a few hours after I left her—when I passed him on the road he was not driving to marry her. . . . Oh, and I might have turned back—I might have saved her."

He thought of that gloomy ride, the spring green looking vivid under the brazen thunder sky, how the lightning had darted in front of the black bulk of the Koenigsberg, and how it had seemed not like a day of love and promise, but rather one of hate and doom. . . . He stood with bent head reflecting that something had been destroyed for all three of them—for her, for him, and, ay, for that fair boy, too—something that not all the gods could bring to life again—Madelon, so fastidious and fragrant, so fine, so noble. . . . And he had got her for a handful of vulgar honours for her vicious brothers, for her detestable father . . . Haverbeck could picture well enough what that

night at Arnsdorf had been, when the young man arrived to disappoint them with his bitter denunciation; the men all furious and desperate, degraded beyond all honour—all drunk, no doubt, and she in the midst of them . . . poor Madelon. . . . Now, it was too late. Half Dresden had seen her riding by the Elector's side, and she was being given apartments in the Residenzschloss, with the Electress arriving immediately.

In this fierce, sad musing he had forgotten Count Stürm, but Count Stürm had not forgotten him. In the midst of his own infuriated reflections he had not lost sight of the possible use the handsome soldier might be to him, and, studying him now, and seeing his obvious agony some dubious hope flickered up in the statesman's mind. Haverbeck and Madelon von Neitschütz had been something to one another, or might be something; he had offered for her twice; he was moved now when he heard of her dishonour, and a woman of her temperament and a man of his attractions. . . . Haverbeck was kept at the court of Dresden, the Elector, who was the most jealous fool alive, would soon find cause to throw over his favourite. . . .

So Stürm said, with considerable force:

"Will you not change your mind now, General de Haverbeck, and remain in Dresden, and be of some support to me?"

Haverbeck stared at him, hardly comprehending his words, not in the least grasping the sense of them.

The minister repeated his arguments more clearly, and tried to show him that it would be to his advantage to forgo the Vienna offer and remain in Saxony, and hold his own under the new commander-in-chief of the army who was, after all, his uncle. . . .

"What do you mean?" asked Haverbeck.

Count Stürm, agitated and overwrought, grew impatient and said the wrong words.

"These Neitschütz, they are your relations; after all they may show you some kindness—they would surely see you set well upon your way. The Elector's mistress will have great influence,

for a time at least, and surely she is likely to prove your friend. . . ."

Then Haverbeck saw the whole design, and his face darkened into bitter disgust.

"I am out of Dresden before the morning."

That was all he said, and left the Residenzschloss, and took the Bächnitz road through streets that he did not see and under skies that he did not heed.

Then he thought he would not go to his house at all, and turned aside to return to the dépôt and make his arrangements for leaving. He meant to go on the instant without waiting for any formalities, but pulling out his handkerchief, he dragged out the lace he had bought for Angelique, and remembered her and the old man, and thought that it would be a meanness to let his own troubles and overthrow interfere with their happiness; he recalled how he had denied the old man several times, and that the last message had been that she was ill; so he mounted his horse again and rode to his little house near Bächnitz. It was now towards the evening and the thunder was gathering again on the horizon, darkening over the vineyards and the waters of the Elbe.

ELEVEN

Delphicus de Haverbeck dismounted at the high wall of his little house in the suburbs of Dresden towards Bächnitz. There was a plain garden with a few erect poplars, the house itself was modern and neat; at the back it gave onto a vineyard and the quick flowing of the wide Elbe. There was no one to welcome Haverbeck for he came by surprise. He had to call once or twice before the servant came out to take his horse, and he thought that the man looked at him curiously, and seemed about to speak, yet afraid to do so, and he wondered if his own countenance had changed since yesterday, and wished he had looked in a mirror before he had come here; for, above all things, he wished to keep secret the anguish of his grief, and to make no parade of the change in his heart and mind since yesterday.

He entered a small white room at the back which was pleasantly and modestly furnished. It was empty and he noted on one of the chairs a woman's workbox, with scissors and bobbins and knotted white cords, it was like that which he had seen at Arnsdorf—he thought how much the same women were, in large things as well as small. Madelon was now one with Angelique, and might be pointed at by the same name and branded with the same shame, and with none of the same excuse for the little dancer who had never been taught honour.

Haverbeck passed to an inner room, and there was Steffani, the Italian Maestro, solitary, with a score of music under his idle hand on the table by the window, his eyes fixed on the river, flowing past beyond the vineyard. He rose when Haverbeck entered but gave him no welcome.

"I'm late," said the soldier, and found it difficult to make his voice easy. "I have been long—"

"You're too late," replied the old musician, but without reproach. "You have been too long, sir—she died this morning."

"She died this morning," repeated Haverbeck; the death of Angelique seemed as impossible as the dishonour of Madelon. "How could she have died so soon?"

"It was the fever, you know she was always frail and weak; then you would not come and she fretted. She had got to know —in the way that women will—about this lady at Arnsdorf and your visit there, and you had spoken of leaving her and going to Vienna."

"She was secure, I would never have abandoned her, she was secure."

"Ay, but that was not sufficient. She loved you, you see—well, she's dead, and I daresay it's a burden and a responsibility off your mind. And as for you, sir," continued the old man, out of a great pity for Haverbeck's silence, "you have nothing to take on your conscience, for you were most generous towards her—far beyond what any other man would have been—"

"I wish I had seen you," said Haverbeck, at length. "I wish I had come."

And he was sorry, ah, infinitely sorry, that he had quite forgotten her, and that he did not now greatly care that she was dead any more than he could greatly care had he seen one white rose the more snapped off the bough where many had already fallen, and many more must soon fall.

"I," he added, "laboured under a severe concern of my own; we may not always, Maestro, so soon and so easily command ourselves. If I had known . . . I hope she did not think I had forsaken her."

"I tried that she should not think so," replied the old man. "She died very suddenly and with no presage. Will you look at her?"

"Why should I look at her?" asked the soldier sadly. "She is a plucked flower now and fit only for the earth."

"But she wished it," persisted the old musician gently. "She wished very much that you should look at her, and she asked

the woman to make her pretty and pleasing; she begged indeed that you would once more see her before the last decay eclipsed her youth."

"I'll go," said Haverbeck.

Without waiting for the old man he went upstairs and turned to her chamber, which was small and coquettish, furnished with pale watered satin and gilt trifles, and shrouded now with frilled muslin curtains against the afternoon sun, which was glittering without with a potent force from beneath the thunderclouds on the wavelets of the Elbe.

The neat woman watching and stitching linen rose at once, curtsied and hurried away; Haverbeck was left alone with Angelique.

She lay as she had died in the downy bed under the pink coverlet, her head slightly to one side; a flush of colour seemed yet to stain her cheek, and a liquid light yet faintly gleamed beneath her fallen lids. Her hands were clasped on her silk night rail, the curtain slightly drawn back, and, lined with saffron and rose-colour, gave a false shadow of life to her frail features that did not yet show the tinge of death. The woman had been for putting crape about her and silver mohair, but the old Italian who could not bear these signs of dolorous mourning had forbidden all such melancholy display, and insisted instead that they should leave on the bedboard her dancer's dress he had brought to her himself yesterday to cheer her with its gaudy colourings.

This hung there now, fold upon fold, flounce upon flounce, of cerise, and orange-coloured satin, glittering with sequins and cascades of sham jewels. Many a time had Haverbeck seen it flash behind the footlights at the Italian Comedy. Angelique had been the most enchanting of dancers, the airiest of Columbines, the most seductive of *ballerine*. She seemed as if she had died very easily and tranquilly, without a struggle or a protest, and the soldier gazed at her long and tenderly, still remorseful, still regretful, that he could care so little whether poor Angelique were alive or dead, being so torn with that other passion that his

mind and heart and senses were deadened to all else. Here, as Steffani had said, there was another tie lapsed, another burden lifted. He was free now of Angelique as he had been since yesterday free of Madelon. His fortunes, indeed, lay elsewhere. He remembered the lace in his pocket and that gave him a pang. He pulled it out and looked at it. He was sorry that she would never be able to thank him for it, sorry that he had failed her at the last, that she had never had the promised gift, and was even more sorry that this neglect had been through another woman, who had not her value. Angelique, the dancer, knew only two virtues, kindness and fidelity; she had practised both.

The soldier, with great delicacy and tenderness, raised her frail head, and slipped the lace cap over her fair fine curls, and tied it under her chin, which was already lightly bound with a blue ribbon to prevent her jaw from falling. He then left her, treading quietly, for she gave an illusion of sleep and went downstairs, where the old musician still sat, the score he could not finish under his withered hand.

"Where is the child?" asked Haverbeck.

Steffani told him that he had been sent away to a neighbour's house for fear of infection.

Haverbeck answered that everything in the house and the house itself must be sold and the money used to provide for the child. Presently, when he was older, he would send for him wherever he might be and train him in arms. "He is the only heir I am likely to have, Steffani, for it's difficult that I shall ever marry."

"You are going away?" cried the old man, all of a tremble and desolate indeed.

"Ay, I am going away, Steffani, to Vienna; and you, if you will, may come with me. I'll have an attorney settle these affairs. Let Angelique's jewels be buried with her—it was never much that I could afford to buy her; she must be buried with honour, although she was a player; that must be seen to, and I will write her epitaph myself."

The old musician thought that this would cause some scandal,

but did not say so for he thought there was a noble and generous spirit in it; he had loved the dancer (who seemed to him gaiety itself) as if she had been a daughter or a grandchild.

"I thought to leave Dresden tonight," considered Haverbeck, "but now I must settle matters here, it will not be until tomorrow. Get ready what you need, Steffani; but we must travel light, and take no more than two body-servants. I am become but an adventurer until I obtain service with the Emperor."

Steffani wondered why he thus cut adrift his fortunes, and what was the new look in his face, and what had occurred at Arnsdorf, but said nothing.

The storm was coming up as it had come up last night, brazenly expanding across the serenity of the sky; the waters of the river seemed very uneasy at their banks, but Haverbeck thought of the great urgency of his own affairs and could not fix his mind on them. He sat down and began to write an epitaph for Angelique, and all the while he thought, "Where is Madelon now?" and of last night's fatal debauch, and what they had both lost there.

Would she have come with him if Casimir von Neitschütz had not flung in with his vile talk of the poor dead girl?

Haverbeck did not believe that; her ambition had always had the upper hand. That she had proved by thus falling to the foulest ignominy rather than relinquishing her ambition, her desires.

"Well, if a man have anything in him, he can overcome these things and go his way. And never was I one that a woman could bring down, however strongly-armed her hand, however heavy the dart she flung against me. Never was I one who could be brought down by women, traitors, or fools. I must go my own way and make my own destiny which will not assuredly be mean."

Thus mused Haverbeck as he wrote, in his careful elegant hand, the epitaph of the dead dancer. Thus he mused, not knowing what his own fate would be.

The storm lowered and the soldier, by the light of a lamp, wrote the Latin lines on a fair sheet of paper, for he was very nice and careful in all his actions; he had kept Angelique so long because she had been neat and fastidious and, on small means, provided an elegant establishment.

Requiescat hic
Pars Mortalis Carlotta Drexel
Obiit Juni 13. *A.° MDCICII.*
Ætat 24.

"Older than Madelon—by the time Madelon was that age—what would Madelon be?"

"Leave that occupation, sir," urged Steffani, timidly.

But Haverbeck answered:

"It takes my mind off worse things.

"The virtues of her Mind excelled the Beauties of her Body, that was Adorned with so many charms,
She set off her mean (but honest) Parentage
By the nobleness of her Behaviour.
She was wise beyond her years."

"How does that go, Steffani, eh?—Ah, the thunder—another storm.

"Fornam Egregiam et Muris Illecebris Ornatum
Virtutes animi superarunt
Plebejum Genus (sed honestum)
Nobilitate morum decoravit
Supra aetatem sagax."

He paused and mended his quill. "I'll not sleep tonight again—I wish I was at the camp. I wish I was leading a night attack. I wish I was dead. Steffani, open the window a little: this is to be of freestone, black marble and alabaster, I'll have it next the chancel window:

"She was above her fortune (especially to the poor)
Very Bountiful.
At the Play House (where she sometimes Acted)
She was modest and untainted.

"That's true, Steffani, she offended none . . . how goes it now?

"After her three days' illness
Being taken with a Hectic fever
With a firm Confidence and Christian Piety
—She submitted to her untimely Fate.

"Poor child, poor Angelique, I'll swear she harmed no one—"
"They'll hardly take her, sir, in a church—"
"They will. I'll see to it—

"A Person to be lamented (if anything that is
Mortal can affect the Mind) by all Persons that
Are indued with Humanity
And by her friends much more to be lamented

Upon her beloved Remains, D. S. H. Baron
de L. H. Caused this stone to be put
As sacred to her Memory.

"So it does, my dear—these storms are very early in the year, and monstrous oppressive."

The old Italian, observing how cool and serene he was, how carefully and thoughtfully he wrote his exact Latin phrases, believed that all his interest in Madelon had been exploded by the sober part of his judgment and that his reason had got the better of that misplaced and unfortunate passion. So the musician ventured to speak of Madelon, whom he had always kept kindly in his heart, and did not wish to bury in an ungrateful secrecy, he had felt always affectionately towards the radiant and brilliant child. He wished, too, to keep his mind from dwelling on what lay above in the coquettishly-clad chamber, so

he asked, timidly, how it went at Arnsdorf and if Madelon were in good health.

Haverbeck continued to write nor did the pen falter in his hand.

"You will hear of her," he answered, "soon in Dresden, but what it is you will hear I cannot bring myself to tell you. The lives of all of them have become strangely confused and tangled and I must tell you not to speak her name to me again."

He looked up and smiled; the storm-light that was coming in through the open window was on his face, mingled with the yellow rays of the lamp, and something had given an added power and dignity to his handsome features, so that Steffani thought that he had never before seen such proud and generous human beauty, though lustre and bloom were quenched by fatigue and pain.

"Do not believe," added Haverbeck, "that I lie under any shackles of terror. Indeed, I am not confounded. She is in her wished-for post, almost on the pinnacle of royalty, and I must make for mine."

"Has she married the Elector?" asked the musician, startled beyond reserve and prudence.

"She is in the shadow of grandeur," replied Haverbeck sternly, "and may in public domineer. Yet she has but pawned her soul in the hopes of an embroidered purse. Leave her to her career and ask me no more. She was once my darling, and I halted in my fortunes to wait for her to come up to me, but now that is over."

He paused, wrote the last line of the epitaph, and folded it across.

"If the storm increases it will be tedious. Last night I did not sleep—nor will tonight, I suppose, and my head aches."

The sun sank behind the dun clouds beyond the river, and sharp lightning began to break the oppressive air.

"I will go upstairs," sighed the old musician, "and set the shutters that she be not disturbed by the tempest."

"Ay," said Haverbeck, with a little smile, "tell them to

grease my boots and set out my equipment, for I have a long journey to make."

He knew that by this summary departure from his duties and his properties, he would lose much, and he could not afford to lose anything, for his fortunes were far from grand or even stable. Yet he could not endure the thought of remaining in Dresden which would mean the possibility of meeting the Elector and Magdalena Sibylla von Neitschütz. So that night he sat up while the storm rustled outside over the vineyard and the river, and settled such of his affairs as he could; he made matters clear with his servants, and left directions for the disposal of the body of Angelique in the Marienkirche in the suburb near Bächnitz. He left his inscription for the lapidary to cut on a fair white stone, and set on a pyramid above the vault where she slept. He arranged, too, such matters as were necessary for the education of his child; then, at last, towards the tawny dawn, he slept, falling asleep with a great weariness on a chair by the half-open window, beside the lamp nearly spent for lack of oil, and his papers correctly docketed, labelled and tied.

Agostino Steffani, seeing him shuddering in his slumber, tenderly threw his mantle over him, and took his hand in his, and sat so beside him until he woke, well on into the wild, tawny morning.

During this vigil the old man had regarded the young soldier with a great love and confidence and devotion; his own thoughts were sad enough, though he tried hardily to combat the influence of the darkness and the storm, and the loneliness of the house, and the thoughts of who lay upstairs in the coquettish little bed with the dancer's robe over the rail and the new cap fastened under her chin; he clasped timidly and with hesitation the hand of the man who had seemed to him so resolute and forcible, formidable and commanding, and yet in his sleep seemed overthrown; he tried not to think of what dark menace had befallen the House of Neitschütz, and of his little Madelon, and not droop into any dismal nor sickly sorrow for these two

young girls who had been—in their separate ways—his darlings.

He endeavoured not to believe either that Delphicus de Haverbeck had looked like a man quietly desperate while he had been writing his Latin epitaph, which even now lay on the unfinished score of music on the table, but wished to cast his thoughts more to the future, to believe that the man was yet so young that there might be before him many delights and happinesses. And he thought, perhaps there will be a third woman, whom he may adore and cherish more than either of these; and yet the old musician doubted this, and felt that his hopes were but a tedious delusion.

The dawn was stormy; the night had been like a pall, that lifted into ragged brightness at daybreak, but with the early morning sunlight the storm rolled up and obscured these blood-red gleams of light and the wind shook and clamoured at doors and windows, with a wild burst of rain and fury. The monotony of the stormy night had culminated in this burst of bellowing thunder, which cracked overhead in a wild rout of the elements.

Steffani woke the dark soldier and helped him to his feet. The old musician feared that his dreams had not been too happy, he had shuddered and winced so often in his sleep; Haverbeck peered about like a man not knowing at once where he was and listened awhile to the storm which had darkened and defiled all the fairness of the morning.

"It will be wild riding today," said Steffani fearfully.

"But ride I must," said Haverbeck, at once remembering everything. He began to unbutton his Saxon uniform and took off his sash and baldric, and all the insignia of the rank he held in the army of Johann Georg IV; sword, hat and gloves were already discarded; then he stood silent and listened to the storm. He turned at last to the window and pulled aside the curtains and looked at the blackness rolling over the river and the vineyard.

"It will soon be over," he remarked. "In the west there is a streak of light."

But for the moment the storm was up and drowning all sounds and blighting all the landscape.

Delphicus de Haverbeck stood in his shirt and ruffles, his hands on his hips, like a man whose life and whose fortunes are broken, and thought, sternly, how he could best put them together again—whether, after all, it would much matter if a Turkish bullet got him as soon as he reached Hungary, and whether he might not be as happy trodden down in one of the Eastern marshes beneath the hoofs of flying horses, as climbing those heights which he no longer regarded with much desire. He put his hand up to his dishevelled black hair and thought of the poor young girl above . . . waiting patiently for her grave. He was sorry for all women—for Angelique—for Madelon; he felt that that part of his heart was shattered past mending; but that a man who was not a fool or a coward should live his life somehow with the best courage possible, so he spoke kindly to the old musician, who was regarding him anxiously, and rang for his valet, told him to prepare his toilet, and to bring out a plain coat and cloak, and a hat without a cockade, and to order his horse to be ready as soon as the storm should abate.

"How many nights must pass before I can tread under the memory of that one night . . . but I'll never forget it . . . and I might have turned back . . . I was trying to pass the time with music and problems while she and they—"

Most poignant this sharp reflection, most bitter the spectacle of love cast down and defiled, most cruel the disappointment at this lost chance, most abominable this ugly turn of events.

He could hardly swallow the coffee Steffani eagerly brought him; he could not look at food; a profound nausea had seized him, soul and body; he became contemptuous of his own weakness.

"Did I think to live cloistered and without difficulties? Did I stake so much on one girl? Then I was less than myself . . . this is weakness and must be overcome. I must be bold and undertaking, not narrow and unsteady—defeated by a little turn of fancy in a Prince, the slightness of a feeble woman. How absurd and extravagant was my vanity in believing I could contend with their ambition."

"The storm, sir, creeps away," observed Steffani, timidly.

"Sooner passes a storm than a whimsy of the heart," sighed Haverbeck. "The infirmities of the soul are more awful than a tempest, Steffani. I, seeing others inconstant and light and weak, resolved to avoid such substantial misery and to raise myself above transitory things and to triumph over all that is deceitful, bewitching or terrible . . . to go steadfast on my short way—yet the corrupt follies and passions of the world have gained entrance into my peace . . . and I am distraught as any child who breaks a toy."

"Madelon," thought the old man, fearfully. "Madelon." But did not dare speak that name.

"Come," smiled the soldier, seeing his companion's dismay. "I have but been despoiled by the chance that lies at catch for all of us—those devils who design to rifle all the world, made bold with me because I came in their way. Therefore, no rash, railing humour over this my common loss. Some work may come my way. And life, at worst, is brief."

TWELVE

"Madame de Rosny," said Madelon, and the two women looked at each other: Madelon beheld that the handsome Françoise de Rosny was withered away to the bone, her face high and drawn, and yellow, and sunken in the cheeks: her eyes dim and hooded deeply with the lids. It was a long habit of hers thus to keep her eyes half shrouded, for she was half afraid of her own glance. She remained now withdrawn into her hood and said, with yet another curtsey:

"I have come to offer you my most admiring felicitations."

"What can we have to do with one another?" asked Madelon, like one alert and on guard against an unknown danger, her foot tapping in a little square of sunshine.

"I might give you some good advice," smiled Madame de Rosny.

"I have had all the advice I need," replied Madelon, drawing away against the back of the sophy.

"And a great deal from me," said her one-time governess. "You must admit," she added, in a cringing tone, "that I trained you very well."

"You trained me for this?" asked Madelon slowly.

"I trained you for his wife," smiled Madame de Rosny, "but I never thought you would be, my dear: and so I prepared you for the second-best, which you have very successfully achieved, and, after all, as his mistress, you may have a far more enjoyable life, and a much wider influence than would ever have come your way if he had had you lawfully."

Madelon did not reply. She stared as if she were looking back into the past and piecing together many incidents, of circumstances, of looks, of gesture, which had meant nothing to

her childish eyes, but now, observed in retrospect, had all the meaning in the world.

"Nothing else," grinned Madame de Rosny, "is talked of in Dresden, but the new luminary which has arisen on the horizon and the brightness of its beams. Everyone says that his infatuation for you knows no bounds, and that you may do as you will with everyone and everything."

She stepped nearer to the girl, still sitting erect amid her spreading skirts on the sophy, and looked at her with a cold sharpness, and added in a tone of flattery that was like an insult: "You certainly are extremely beautiful, my dear, and very young, and I daresay you may rule him for years yet, if you are careful to keep all other pretty faces out of his way, and not to damp him by any show of inconstancy."

Madelon put her spread fingers over her breast, as if she protected something there.

"You are very vile, madame."

Françoise de Rosny gave her forced and broken laugh.

"I am the same as you, only a lifetime further on the road. When you are fifty some child may think you vile."

Madelon's golden eyes darkened and drooped.

"Am I to have no share in your favours?" asked the ancient governess. "I surely did something to deserve them. All those arts and graces which so enchant him—your dancing and your singing, the way you can dress, and your air—"

"Do I owe them to you?" whispered Madelon. "And you are right, I suppose I do," she added, glancing down.

"And I can do more for you yet. You are very inexperienced and very young, almost a child still, after all. And he, I take it, is obstinate, hot-headed, and rather more than hot-blooded: and you will have to be very careful and remember that when you seem to hold him most tightly by a chain, you will very likely hold him most loosely by a thread. For he has heats like fevers or frenzies, and it takes some wit to live under the favour of such men."

"I have wit enough," replied Madelon, "and I am very sensible

how ill a trade I am engaged in—how much I have ventured, how little I may gain. Perhaps in you," she added with horror, "I do behold the image of my own age—when lust which is sudden and violent has done with me and love has travelled far away. Therefore I take this brief power I hold now—I command you to go. Who is so deep a fool as to keep before him the picture of his own corruption?"

"For a young moppet," smiled the ancient governess, "you speak cleverly. Have the good sense then to understand me. Your father has a mighty resolve against me because of some letters; eh, you know?"

"Ay," said Madelon, still quietly, still with that stare of horror. "Why must you do that?"

"I was forced." Madame de Rosny was glib. "Stürm had my poor house raided. My papers seized—your brothers had been watched. Pray, my child," added Madame de Rosny with extreme menace, "persuade your father to believe this."

"You sold the letters," said Madelon.

Madame de Rosny, with a threatening smile, sidled nearer the elegant sophy.

"You must not molest me. You must tell your father I will not be meddled with. I did not injure you. You must believe that. Better, eh? I know too much, eh? Of the old days at Arnsdorf—your lover is stupid, is fearful, is ignorant. If I was to tell him some little things, you would lose him."

"Keep away from me," breathed Madelon, rising. "You sold the letters."

"You sold yourself," smiled Madame de Rosny with a clutch of her bony hand on the back of the gilded sophy, "and your pretty brothers and your honourable father clinched the bargain. Oh, people laugh at it. I can tell you! A Neitschütz! The crowd who fawn on you here rail at you in your antechamber."

"I know," interrupted Madelon. "You can teach me nothing of my own degradation. I have covered every aspect of it; not the least is this intimacy with you. I understand you very well.

Be at ease. My father will not be revenged on you. He will not dare. We have all been too long and too early involved."

At this assurance, however insultingly given, Madame de Rosny became reassured and amiable; she smiled and nodded; she could well believe that whatever feelings of deep hatred Neitschütz entertained towards her, he would as soon put his hand into a nest of vipers as interfere with her; but she had thought it prudent to deliver this warning.

"I am your good friend and servant, little Madelon," she grinned. "Perhaps, some day, I can be useful to you, if your stupid lover should grow stale or restive, I might assist you to retain his favour."

"How could you help me to keep him?" asked Madelon, peering at her with a horrid curiosity.

"There are ways . . . I and the Baroness von Ilten keep an establishment for supplying gentlemen with diversions—gambling and pleasant companions now and then; medicinal drugs which lift the spirits; or maybe, bemuse the senses. . . ."

"Witchcraft," whispered Madelon with a lift of a pale lip—"have you come to that, madame? Witchcraft—those trashy follies!"

Madame de Rosny laughed quietly. "They're only trashy follies to the ignorant, my dear, there's more behind every devilment than the innocent think. . . . Witchcraft and enchantment may seem a stupidity to you, but I know better . . . how drugs will whip up passion when it flags, and inflame love when it weakens, daze a man to his own folly; potions will make a man sick or well, as you wish; and it may be, my dear Madelon, that one day, such things will come within the range of your necessities."

"Never," cried Madelon. "I believe nothing of these matters. I will not hear of them—I will know nothing of such horrors. If you want money I must give it to you; it seems there are many people to whom I must give money. But of your advice and your presence I will have none."

Madame de Rosny was quite prepared for such an answer. She had come to satisfy her own curiosity, as to the present appearance and manners of the girl, to see if she could form some judgment of how long her power would be likely to last. She wished also to remind her of her existence, and she did not doubt that some day, perhaps a day not very far distant, it might be that Magdalena Sibylla von Neitschütz would be eager enough to renew the ancient acquaintanceship. So she wrote on a little tablet the address at which she might be found—the infamous establishment of Fani von Ilten, "well-known to your brothers, Madelon"—and left it on the table and took her leave, a by no means dissatisfied woman.

She had come and she had gone openly, and many people in the Residenzschloss knew her, where she dwelt, and her reputation, and there were some sly looks and sneering whispers at the company the new favourite so early kept.

Madelon, alone again, was not thinking of the present but of the past—those little incidents and episodes of childhood—and of that occasion on her twelfth birthday, when Madame de Rosny had snatched the little net cap off her head and pushed her forward to attract the notice of the Elector and whispered to her that she was to deny a kiss to the young prince, but to give many to his little brother. Then she had not understood.

"I never knew," she mused, "where they were leading me. I do not think my father or my brothers knew; but Madame de Rosny did. She saw this exactly. She bred me to be a wanton."

Madelon could not consider her childhood without considering Haverbeck. Her mind now swung round to him, travelling away from Dresden, away from her present state. She wondered if he had heard, before he left, of her elevation, and if he had taken with him the woman and the child of whom Casimir had spoken. She walked up and down her splendid room, and thought how much more splendid she would force Johann Georg to make these apartments. She had heard of the treasures of the House of Wettin which lay in the vaults beneath the Residenzschloss; she would make him bring them out and spread them at

her feet, and she would choose what she wished for her adornment, and for the decoration of her apartments, and what she did not wish the Electress might have. She could play with armies and with States and princes. She would do so, carefully, steadily, so that her toys did not break in her hands. With a look, with a caress, with an embrace, she could make the Elector like a twist of wax in her fingers. She would have everything that her eminence could give her, for nothing could make up to her for what she had lost. And no worldly power could staunch the black bitterness of that everlasting wound in her honour and her pride.

The Electress arrived. She was a woman of thirty—plain, awkward and timid, but with fine eyes and a certain air of grace and breeding. She was not displeased with her young husband, for he had been as civil as could have been expected. She believed that she had a friend and protector in Count Stürm and that her party, which was the French party, should dominate the court of Saxony. In short, she looked forward to a peaceful, if not a felicitous, life in Dresden.

When her ladies were presented to her by the mistress of the bedchamber, one of them particularly attracted her attention. There was no occasion then for her to enquire as to who this lady might be; but, presently, when she was in her apartments and being dressed for the ceremonial banquet, she saw this same lady standing by her table and holding a casket of jewels. She looked at her intently and said:

"And who, madame, are you? I did not, in the confusion of the presentations just now, fully understand your name."

The lady curtsied, with the jewels gleaming in her hand, and replied, gently:

"I am Magdalena Sibylla von Neitschütz, the daughter of Marshal von Neitschütz, who commands the Elector's army."

The Electress gazed at her, feeling, she knew not why, frightened; then asked the lady, timidly, if she were married or betrothed.

"Neither, madame," said Madelon, with another grave curtsey, "nor like to be."

The Electress laughed uneasily, and flushed, and knew not why. She glanced round at the other ladies and saw them all regarding the floor blankly. But Madelon preserved her presence of mind and her serenity, and said coolly:

"Your Highness will do well to put on a little red tonight, the journey has something fatigued you. I think that diamonds are too garish with that white dress, the pearls would have a softer effect."

The Electress did not answer, but turned again to her toilet; but she could not avoid Madelon, for, as she looked at herself in the high garlanded mirror, in which her own humble charms were dimly reflected, she saw behind her the flashing radiance of Magdalena Sibylla, and was troubled, and humiliated.

She lost her discomfort during the pompous festivities of the banquet, but afterwards, when she had retired to her chamber and spent the night alone, it returned to her, and the hours went by for her with monotonous and profound melancholy. In the morning she learnt of her most wretched situation; she beheld everyone neglect her to compete for the favours of the adored mistress.

Count Stürm told her, briefly and bitterly, the position in the Residenzschloss, and could give her no consolation but the dry advice of patience: "He was young, he was violent, he might prove fickle—for the moment this creature had him—a long, steady attachment, like a bewitchment, but tact and patience and she might be defeated—her family was loathed and now deeply disgraced in the opinions of honourable men. A considerable part of whom would always be against them—with time, with smooth, careful dealing. . . ."

So the defeated minister consoled the neglected wife while he inwardly cursed himself for not selecting a woman more capable of rivalling Madelon; for, he thought sourly, the wife to the mistress is as a dip to a star.

THIRTEEN

Never had a woman ruled a state more completely; the European Powers who wished to obtain the alliance of the Prince had to court the woman; kings flattered Madelon; Sir George Stepney was sent from England with the excuse of congratulating the Elector on his marriage, but with the main object of buying the Neitschütz; the Electress, after tears, reproaches and rages all in vain, retired to her dower house at Bretzenau. While that rich summer held Madelon kept the Elector at Moritzburg; festivals, the chase, deep noon-day raptures, moonlit gallantries, the society of the easy, the witty, the splendid, satisfied his sense and his pride; Madelon as his mistress made him, he knew, the envied of other princes; who had a lover so beautiful, so clever, so brilliant?

Bold and ambitious, she inspired him with an interest in his wide estates, his enormous wealth; her father was an efficient general, a stern soldier; the army was soon restored to the excellence it had achieved in the youth of Johann Georg III; the troops liked to see Madelon, in the uniform of a General of Cavalry, galloping over the parade ground; the courtiers liked to see her, sumptuous in the ball room or the audience chamber, and for all the ugly words mouthed after her, the solid citizen and the vulgar rout liked to see her drawn through the streets of Dresden in a green and silver coach with six bay horses trapped in azure leather, erect, serene and lovely as a young man's dreams; in truth she gave a lustre to all she touched, a dignity to every scene she graced; she was named hard, brazen, rapacious, but all admitted her kindness, the sweetness of her manners, remote but never less than courteous; she was, too, magnificent; musicians, painters, jewellers, came from all parts of the Empire to em-

bellish Dresden; at a picnic in the glades of Moritzburg; at a supper in a pavilion on a lake, at a formal banquet in the Residenzschloss, she was alike at her ease, rising above the odium of her position and dispensing her favours with a princely grace.

Sometimes she was nobly generous: a certain Jacques Falaiseau, brother of the Hanover envoy, had found favour with Count Stürm, to whom he was distantly related, and been given a commission in the Life Guards; Marshal von Neitschütz was for cashiering this man, who, a Frenchman and a bitter Protestant, had spoken openly against the *Maitresse en titre;* Madelon had interfered to save Captain Falaiseau from the effects of his impudence.

"Do you not suppose," she had asked her father, "that so everyone talks of me, or would if they dare?"

In the Autumn she travelled with her lover down the Elbe to Bodenbach, where the water gets lost, and there rode with him along the windings of the river deep into the haunted mountains; they slept in the huge fortress of Louwenstein, and travelled on through the Liebethaler Gründ, by the side of pellucid streams, up the great gloomy gorge to the miller's house where they breakfasted on black bread and apples she had brought in her pockets; for days she kept him in the great tableland of mountains, Uttewalder Gründ, the Bastei, so high above the Elbe, Lilienstein, and they told each other, riding side by side for hours through narrow defiles, all the tales of the Kobolds and gnomes who lived here; in these sombre fissures of rock, myriads of fierce demons kept guard over faëry gold. "I would get some for you, Madelon, if I could . . ."

There were other spots from which Madelon turned aside coldly—one rock, where a saintly virgin had prayed herself to death, raised high above the temptations of the world; the shuddering abyss of the Jungfrausprung's where a Saxon maiden had hurled herself over rather than be defiled by a brutal pursuer. . . .

As the winter darkened she brought him back to Dresden; carnivals then, on the frozen Elbe, sledges in the snow-blocked

streets, plays, masques, balls, gambling in the Residenzschloss, and always Madelon at his side, ready to flatter, to caress, to praise, to inspire, to turn into his arms. Peaked and dimmed the Electress came from Bretzenau to uphold her official position; her husband was no more than civil; Stürm snarled with vexed disappointment over this futile, barren marriage, and waited with outward patience; Clement von Neitschütz was contracted to Fräulein Winzinroth, the richest heiress of Hanover; the Elector bought and furnished a house for Madelon, she had wearied of the grim, ancient Residenzschloss; he humoured her in everything; he hoped she would have a child, on his knees he swore that if she had a child he would make it a legitimate prince; he begged God for this favour, but it seemed that Madelon was to be as sterile as the Electress; in the night she would rise up, make a little light and read a shred of paper cut from a *Gazette* which she always carried with her and which told of the engagement in the autumn at Tzeged, when General de Haverbeck had been victorious and wounded—a bruise in the breast, the report said.

This, the folded worn scrap of the news letter, Madelon read, secretly, at night, stealing away from her sleeping lover, or in her carriage or sledge, drawn from her muff of sable or ermine; she had no other news of him; no one mentioned his name or his exploits to her, and she spoke them to none.

With the darkening down of that winter was a horrid outburst of witchcraft again in Saxony; at Lebnitz two women had confessed to devilish practices; on the Bohemian frontier, that wild, desolate haunted region, a tribe of warlocks were discovered celebrating unclean rites; the old lime tree growing in the castle of Flöha split apart and a dead child was found in the hollow trunk; at Chemnitz, one of the sheriffs was stricken even in church, with a hideous palsy of which he accused his own grandchild, and she, flying from justice, hanged herself; in Pockau all the young wives were barren and an old woman gave birth to a monster with horns; on the Bavarian frontiers fiends were seen walking at nightfall in the fields; all over the country

frantic women accused themselves of demon lovers; human flesh stank and sizzled in marketplaces and shrieks issued from the high-set windows of prisons; Madelon, who could do so much, could not stop this invading horror; on this point she found the Elector obdurate; he would have no mercy with devils; he was already uneasy that the court divines evaded giving his mistress absolution, fearful of the omen of the dead infant in the lime tree in the courtyard of Flöha; one of his line, the Albertine Princes of the House of Wettin, had planted that tree—did this portend the blasting of his posterity? He commanded a fierce persecution of the witches; he kept his young brother abroad, terrified lest in that fair face he beheld the countenance of his heir; he grew violent, moody, fierce at intervals; at present she would charm away these moods; Stürm believed that it would not always be so; quiet, subservient, in the background, he waited; the action of Saxony still was doubtful; all hung on the caprice of Madelon; the Allies, France, or a third neutral party with Denmark and Sweden?

Very high bids were offered to the house of Neitschütz and Magdalena Sibylla von Neitschütz entered the rank of the nobility of the Empire under the title of Countess Rocklitz, in return for which she promised the Allies that the Elector should take the field with his troops as soon as the sharpness of the January frosts was over. When Count von Spanheim, the Imperial Envoy, gratefully thanked her for her assurance, he let her know that she might hope to enter the Electoral College as a princess in no short period of time, if she could keep Saxony steady against the French.

"Your interests, madame," he said, with a thin smile, "are represented at Vienna by other ministers than those of the Elector. You have become very powerful in Europe."

The lady did not hear this; she was thinking of the Rocklitzenberg, the great mountain above the little town from which she took her title and which had a foul repute as the haunt of unhuman terrors.

FOURTEEN

The Countess Rocklitz, folding and re-folding the little paper on the table, would hear again of the Imperial triumphs in the Turkish war.

Spanheim, who could not imagine what her interest might be, was sure she had some acute concern in the matter and told her of the late great engagements as far as he had come at any knowledge of them and as deeply as he thought a woman's mind could follow; while he spoke he was watching her, wondering.

"But you, Countess, already know these stories."

"It amuses me," said Madame Rocklitz, "to hear them again."

She was silent, and as she did not dismiss him he did not leave, but stood, waiting her commands. He knew only too well to what extent she must be flattered and obeyed. While he waited he wondered at her, studying her out of his half-dropped lids and cool eyes. He admired her and slightly feared her; he believed that there was no limit to her ambition, her resource, her rapacity, her ability.

It was true that he had bought her; she and her family were the pensioners of the Allies; she had permitted the Elector to agree to put troops in the field for the Emperor; still he did not trust her. He thought her equally without shame and fear, and admired her very greatly. Her beauty, too, was extraordinary. It seemed never to fade, or dim, or be fatigued, but always to be brilliant and radiant, with the quality of life, of light itself.

She smiled now in a way he did not greatly like—he most mistrusted her when she was most amiable; she said softly and agreeably:

"We come now to my favour which I have to ask His Imperial Majesty; a plenipotentiary will be sent from Vienna to Dresden with this treaty, will he not?"

Spanheim replied that this would be so.

"The favour that I ask is that Marshal de Haverbeck may be this plenipotentiary."

"He is not the most suitable person," objected Spanheim, slowly, turning over many things rapidly in his mind.

The Countess Rocklitz interrupted smoothly:

"He is a friend of my childhood—the Elector's childhood—I suppose now they will be companions in arms, and they may like to renew that ancient acquaintanceship, which was not without its pleasantness; and I, too, should like to see Marshal de Haverbeck after his great successes. I suppose the perfume of his laurels is not so intoxicating that he might not find some interest in seeing me again."

She fixed Spanheim with her large, brilliant, light brown eyes and smiled and tapped the protocol with her fan and lightly tapped her foot upon the floor also, as a woman who would not be gainsaid or denied.

"Marshal de Haverbeck," she added, "is a Saxon, and it is most fitting that he should be sent to Dresden. I do demand and expect it."

"Madame, I will do what I can," replied Spanheim, cautiously. "This gentleman carries himself very high, and it is difficult even for the Emperor to deal with him against his wish. If he should not choose to come—"

The Countess lightly swept the protocol to the floor as though it were a scrap of waste paper, and said quietly:

"The Emperor must see to it that he does come, or the Alliance is in danger. I have a fancy for Marshal de Haverbeck's visit, Count, and my fancy must be indulged."

They looked at each other, she unsmiling now; he bowed, as if in conventional assent to a prince's demands.

"I have a reason," she added, rising, "for this gentleman's presence in Dresden. When he was in the Saxon army he

complained, and justly, of its condition. I should be glad for him to see that we have some very good soldiers now, and that our organization is excellent. I have designed a review for his benefit."

Spanheim pursed up his lips and thus committed himself as far as he might; he was thinking: "You are going rather far, you are going, perhaps, a little too far; I wonder if the Elector is quite the fool you seem to think him."

He reflected that she was only a young woman; he recalled some of the tales Stürm had told him; Haverbeck was an early, a refused, suitor; everyone knew that; was it possible that this woman whom he, Spanheim, regarded as an accomplished, heartless courtesan, really nourished a romantical passion for an early lover?

He admired her courage; but, however blind in his passion was the Elector, surely she ventured too much? Since her influence had been bought with so much cost it was not desirable she should lose it; Spanheim was galled.

"I would not," he said, "put you out of patience, but I must remind you of the avid enemies you have, none the less perilous for being submissive."

"Marshal de Haverbeck," replied Madame Rocklitz, "comes to Dresden. If another man brings the Treaty it will not be signed."

Spanheim gave her a sorry look.

"You can never inveigle the Elector into this, however you keep him in humour—"

"This is plain talk," said the lady, taking off her fur cloak and showing her velvet dress with rich devices in gold.

"We are Allies," returned the Austrian, "in a manner, friends. I would not have you lose for a chimera very solid advantages—do you not, madame, value the sweets of dominion?"

"Your advice is rejected," replied Madame Rocklitz. "Why should I not wish to see this man? He is my cousin."

"The more dangerous."

"Perhaps he flouted me," she smiled, "and I want revenge."

"Come, madame, the cheat is too palpable. You are interested in this gentleman. Make no trifling cavils. Do you want to play into the hands of Stürm and the Electress?"

"Count Stürm," Madame Rocklitz assured him, "goes the moment I wish it; and, as for that unfortunate Princess, she can injure none but herself."

This obstinate attitude on the part of the favourite filled Spanheim with a lively vexation; it would be infuriating if, after he had bought her influence, she fell: he looked at her intently; he had two daughters about her age, newly come from a convent, innocent as doves, unpolluted as lily buds—it was odd to consider that; Madame Rocklitz fondled the curl, fine as sleave silk, on her bosom, and asked him why he stared at her.

"You have admirably held a difficult position," he flattered her, "been something more than a woman of wit and judgment—do not now be less. I would have you keep fair with fortune. Remember you have to uphold your father and your brothers."

"I have never forgotten it. They have everything—posts, credit, fortunes, manors and castle, pensions . . . I may, therefore, act in my own interest for once," she smiled, sternly. "I, too, must be indulged—"

"By the visit of Marshal de Haverbeck?"

"Yes."

"Madame," said Spanheim, vehemently, "I entreat you not to be overweening in this—women of parts are apt to be very positive in their opinions—what strikes their fancy hath them wholly."

"Fancy!" mocked the lady. "Fancy!"

"I hope it is no more, Madame Rocklitz; look at the Elector—consider that all your riches, power, authority, depend on him. I know him, as perhaps you cannot."

"And yet I know him very well."

"Does he show you his gloomy moods? Lately, he has be-

come uneasy—he winces from your Church condemnation—you must get one of your pastors to give you absolution—that sticks with him."

"I shall overcome that—the court divines will be dismissed."

"But the Consistory and Herr Knock are against you, Madame Rocklitz."

"I shall carry it, even against them."

"Likely enough—yet be watchful and prudent. You have interfered for the witches too often, the Elector has told me how detestable he finds this panic at sorcery."

"But you," she interrupted, indignantly, "know that it is but sottish weakness to believe such absurdities—all these marvels and prodigies are either capable of a natural explanation or are the inventions of malice or ignorance."

"Yet people die for them every day," he reminded her.

"That is horrible. Am I not right to endeavour to stem these persecutions?"

"You are wrong. The Elector believes in the Devil—he also believes the Devil is meddling in the affairs of Saxony and talks of setting up a Commission of Judges and Bishops to purge the country."

"This," said Madame Rocklitz, with distaste, "is beyond the scope of our converse—will you send Marshal de Haverbeck to Dresden?"

"The Elector is troubled about the omen at Flöha."

"It was some wicked murder," shuddered the lady, "it meant nothing."

"He thinks it did—he is uneasy because he has no prospect of children. However infatuate a prince, madame, he will think sometimes of his line. Take care, he does not begin to consider himself cursed. Some of the clergy have hinted as much."

"You are trying to terrify me."

"To warn you. Is this a moment to bring to Dresden Marshal de Haverbeck, once your suitor, a man equipped to arouse jealousy, who in all outrivals the Elector? A man he

detested, who flung up his service in disdain—once his subject, now the Emperor's favourite general? Madame, you cannot do it."

"I will do it," she replied, with a sudden sparkle of animation; she even seemed pleased, gay; Spanheim was amazed at this spectacle of feminine lightness and recklessness; he knew that if she insisted he must gratify her or forgo the alliance with Saxony, and he cursed the destiny that made the fortunes of nations dependent on a woman's unstable will.

"I'll do it," he assented, grimly, "but you will smart for it."

She smiled under his reproof.

"Do not put me with the common rate and bulk of mankind. I am not dazzled by those airy and glaring notions that do entice most. Perhaps for all I have I care very little."

She paused.

"Perhaps I can mete out my loss, Count Spanheim. You instruct me how to soothe and cheat my master—can you tell me how to soothe and cheat myself?"

He shook his head.

"You are too young for repentance."

"Repentance! I did not speak of that."

He was puzzled; did she mean that she would give up everything for Haverbeck? If she did, she made a childish mistake, for even if she could escape from her lover and her family, the other man, Spanheim was sure, would never marry her; he might, though, take her as his mistress; she was dangerous, a complete wanton, thought Spanheim, with sudden disgust. Tired already of one lover, searching for another; he knew her type, she would bring every man she seduced to ruin with that face that retained so innocent an outline. Haverbeck was too good for her harlot's tricks—she'll pull down Saxony before she had finished; what more perilous than a woman of unbridled desires with the delicate aspect of a maiden? Yet he could not contest her point.

"I'll endeavour to do what you request."

"It is my condition," she reminded him.

Spanheim, taking his leave, gave her a curt look of scorn; erect and fine she was in her blue velvet gown stuck with bullion, her hair in the wanton disorder she had made fashionable, Saxony's diamonds at her zone, her lovely face that still retained that beguiling expression of purity—she must be corrupt indeed to wish the man who had once held her in honest esteem to see her open shame.

So thought Spanheim, knowing little of love.

FIFTEEN

It was Casimir's obscene laughter that pointed the news which reached Dresden soon enough that Marshal de Haverbeck was to be sent as plenipotentiary with the Pact of Alliance from the Emperor. It was Count Stürm who got out of him when he was in his cups, half-maudlin, half-drunken, the fact that the very night that Madelon had made her bargain with the Elector, Delphicus de Haverbeck had been at Arnsdorf. . . . Casimir, his beauty all bloated and raddled, his lips loose and trembling, his eyes flushed and his lids drooping, his complexion blotched with powder, his wig awry, and his breath fiery with spirits, made a drunken boast to Count Stürm, who took pains to often be his companion, that he had brought off that stroke of business.

"If I hadn't told her that he'd got a mistress she'd have gone off with him—sentimental hussy! and missed the fool and her fortune."

Count Stürm noted the tipsy boast which he knew well enough contained a sharp kernel of truth.

"Delphicus de Haverbeck," he reflected, "is the weak point in the armour of the Rocklitz . . . In ordering him to be sent to Dresden, she has committed her first indiscretion."

Never before, he admitted in grim admiration, had the young woman made a false step; she had been as rigidly faithful to the Elector as if she had been his wife; she had given him no cause for any jealousy or uneasiness; she faced her disgrace, her scandal, the sharp tongues of censure, of envy, of scorn, with the coolness of a brave soldier facing the flames of battle. Never had Stürm, watching her constantly, noting her cruelly, seen her flinch. To no one had she revealed herself. But now, in summoning Count Marshal de Haverbeck from Vienna, she had surely disclosed herself, at least to Stürm.

"She has ruled but six months, and already she forgets her prudence. Does she think she can take another lover under that boy's nose? Mad as he is for her, crazy with jealousy even of her shadow! You're not quite so clever as all that, I think, my dear."

The minister took an early opportunity (for he did not now often have occasion to see his master alone, there was usually one of the Neitschütz present), but he did at last find a moment when he could say, casually enough:

"Is not Marshal de Haverbeck a strange choice to send from Vienna to Dresden with the Articles of the Alliance?"

He had the satisfaction of seeing his stroke tell at once on Johann Georg; the ingenuous young man flushed and exclaimed:

"Marshal de Haverbeck! Who is sending him?"

"The Emperor," said Ferdinand Stürm, smoothly. "Spanheim tells me that he has a special request that he might be envoy and that the Emperor has acceded, and that the Marshal is probably by now on the road."

"A special request from whom?" scowled Johann Georg.

And with infinite relish and a difficulty in keeping a note of exultation from his voice, Stürm replied:

"The Countess Rocklitz."

Johann Georg scowled. He had to make a considerable effort not to show that he was shocked and startled. His heavy jaw set sullenly and the blood rushed to his blond face. Stürm longed to add one or two pungent remarks, such as: "What do you expect from a woman like that?" "And I don't suppose fidelity was in the bargain," and "Look out, your Highness, the man is confoundly handsome—confoundly successful with the hussies," and to recall to the Elector's mind that she had remembered him, that he was at Arnsdorf that very night last June. . . .

But Stürm did not think it wise to mention any of these matters, and it was not long before Clement von Neitschütz entered and broke up the interview. But the minister was not ill-satisfied with his work.

The Elector went directly to the apartments of Madame Rocklitz.

She had that morning coaxed out of him, and not for the first time, the keys to his great and immeasurable treasure, kept in the green room or vaults beneath the Residenzschloss—called for a hundred years Das Grüne Gewolbe—the richest treasure owned by any prince in Europe and accumulated by the Princes of the Albertine line for the last two centuries; so vast and so priceless was this collection of precious objects that it was commonly believed that many of them had been made by the Elector Johann Georg I out of magic gold which he had manufactured himself in his alchemist's laboratory; the wealth of this prince had been so fabulous that the supposition was not absurd. His successors had been prudent and had conserved what his magic arts had produced, the House of Wettin owned too the largest silver mines in Europe and there were few who could compete with them in the outward display of pomp and power; the treasures of the green vaults were supposed to outshine those of the Hofburg in Vienna. Arch-Marshal of the Empire, the Elector of Saxony had the right to carry the Imperial sword at a coronation, and his display on those occasions of gold and silver plate, the parade of diamonds in habit and hat, his dress and cloak set with pearls and ruby, sapphire and emerald, had always been such as to outshine his peers and fellow princes.

Twice before the Rocklitz had coaxed out of her lover the keys of the famous vaults, and gone down there and selected for her own use and adornment some of the famous treasures at which the Electress had never even looked. And this morning when she had glanced out of the window of their room on to the courtyard wet and cold with melting snow, and seen the grey sky smooth and dull as a goose's breast overhead, she had turned into his arms again and asked for the key of the treasure-house to beguile the quiet winter day.

That grey sky of the early morning had now spread into the muffled gust of a storm.

Snow beat softly on the palace windows. As the Elector

entered her room he saw at once that she had already visited the treasure vaults, and that her servants had brought up into her apartments vases of jasper, of serpentine, of onyx and heliotrope; statuettes from the antiques of bronze; jewels of Saxon pearls, aigrettes of diamonds, carvings in ivory, amber and coral and pale flower-decked porcelain, fine as a butterfly's wings, from his celebrated factory at Meissen. All these gorgeous and precious objects were set about on a soft shining Chinese carpet for her inspection.

Madelon reposed on a day-bed cushioned in gold brocade, wearing a coat of white fur, cross-laced short stays with silver ribbon; she admired this and that, and ordered how they should be set out around her room, which was already replenished with silk and gold tapestry, with vases of bloodstone and alabaster with rock crystal lamps, with curtains and hangings of Utrecht velvet arranged with the skill and taste of men trained to the utmost fineness.

The Elector paused inside the door, and felt a certain sense of slight or insult, when he saw his peerless treasures thus scattered over a lady's boudoir, and viewed so carelessly, almost as much with disdain as with admiration. He would not have felt this, but would have been infatuate with love and delight at the thought that she might gain pleasure from anything that was his, if it had not been that Stürm had mentioned Haverbeck. As it was, he violently told the servants to be gone and stood sullen in the middle of the room, among the vases of bronze and the statuettes of silver. He looked at her uneasily, his pride of birth, of race, oddly offended; he decided that he would not easily give her his keys again.

"Why are you angry?" asked Madame Rocklitz. She knew at once his moods and never tried to evade them.

Johann Georg, being incapable of any guile, replied, bluntly:

"Why did you ask Spanheim to send Haverbeck to Dresden?"

She had for days been prepared for that question, and had most carefully rehearsed her answer.

"Who told you that I had?" she asked, lightly; the news was

sure to come to his ears, but it was as well to know who had first brought it.

"Count Stürm," he replied, sullenly.

Madelon reflected, instantly, that the old minister, despite his flatteries and compliance, was still distinctly her enemy.

She replied carelessly:

"Count Stürm is old and past his work. He makes you look foolish in the other courts of Europe. A sick man, too; I should, on the first occasion, retire him."

Then, lest he should think she had tried to evade his first question, she replied to that challenge.

"I wish to see Haverbeck again. Why not?"

Her lovely face was serene.

"Any woman would understand my motive, as I suppose. Delphicus de Haverbeck knew Magdalena Sibylla von Neitschütz—he does not know Madame Rocklitz. I should like him to make her acquaintance."

"Why?" persisted the Elector obstinately, and still with a lowering frown. "I last saw him riding from Arnsdorf, then, on a sudden, he threw up his commission and was gone from Dresden."

"Your Highness," smiled Madame Rocklitz—she never failed on every possible occasion to give him his full title and all respect, to elevate him in his own eyes—"your Highness, he could not endure to face the man who had had the fortune which he had missed—"

"He was your suitor, I know," said Johann Georg, striding up and down between the bronze figures and the tall vases; the enamelled figures of saints, the carved ivories of satyrs, gods, beasts, birds, dragons, the caskets and cabinets of black amber, sardonyx and chrysolite.

"And I refused him," said Madame Rocklitz. "Once, twice, three times," she seemed to repeat the words with infinite pleasure, "he has been refused my hand."

"Well, why can't you let it go at that?" said Johann Georg, un-

easily. And he added, with youthful jealousy: "He's successful—a successful soldier—and that pleases the women, I know."

"You," smiled Madelon, watching him, "will be a successful soldier. Let your Highness but get into the field with your own men at your back, and you will return to me with armfuls of captured flags and laurel wreaths and *Te Deums* ringing in your ears." She turned round a pearl ring which was like a thick bubble on her finger, and added, "Delphicus de Haverbeck is but an adventurer, after all—a mercenary captain, a soldier of fortune."

"He does not so think himself, nor do his friends so describe him," objected Johann Georg obstinately. "He is on his mother's side of the house of Lüneburg, and they have helped him. He lodges with the Duke of Brunswick in Vienna. The Emperor has set him high. There is talk of a Princess for his wife."

"Ah," cried Madame Rocklitz, "a Princess for his wife—I have not heard that talk."

The Elector paused heavily close to her couch where she leant on cushions of sapphire silk.

"Why do you want him here?" he persisted, staring down with suspicious eyes behind the thick fair lashes.

She looked up and spoke with animation and a radiant sparkle: "I have changed in these six months, and you, too, and the army of Saxony. Do you remember how he criticized it? That memorial he sent? He was right, but under my father's hands it has become a very efficient instrument. He never knew you, you know—you were a boy then, just a boy to him, but now, you are a prince indeed."

She added, a little wildly: "Don't you desire him to see that—that you have an army now, one of the best in Europe, and—and—a mistress whom he wished for a wife? Did he not hurt your pride a little in the old days? He hurt mine, sir."

"Ah, he hurt your pride," said Johann Georg, as if a new idea had entered his head. "And how was that?"

She answered, obliquely, "Did he not hurt yours a little, sir—a very successful, flaunting, arrogant man? Then let him come

to Dresden and set such pomp and parade before him that he shall return to Vienna and say that Saxony is not to be despised."

"But you—you admire him?" objected the Elector, still doubtful, but hardly able to withstand her arts.

"If I had admired him I might have had him—you know where my choice fell."

She turned on him those clear, light-golden eyes, which never failed to exercise for him such a peculiar fascination, and added:

"If you wish, convey to the Emperor that another envoy would be more acceptable, but if you do I shall be disappointed, for I shall feel that you are not sure of yourself, sir, and that you do not wholly trust me."

"That is not true," muttered the young Elector uneasily.

"Why, then, show it," she smiled lightly, and yet with ardour; "why should you be uneasy about a man like Haverbeck? Need I remind you of what I have given you, your Highness, and how I am placed? What more pledge do you want? Oh, my love, shall I never lift us above petty follies?"

Johann Georg was half ashamed and wholly convinced. Her word, her look, her glance, encouraged him to feel noble and great and strong, as if the two of them were set high above the world.

"What should it matter to me who comes from Vienna?" he cried, and felt regretful and remorseful that he had ever mentioned Haverbeck. Never yet had he formed a resolution that she could not, if she wished, charm away; never yet had he been able to withstand her arguments, her persuasion, her enchantment; and his mind lingered, as it had often lingered of late, on that word "enchantment."

He sat beside her on the downy blue pillows of the couch, and taking her hand, asked her with trembling eagerness if, when he went to the war to open the campaign in the spring, she would come with him?

She promised that she would, smiling gravely, and fondling his fair flushed face with the tips of her fine fingers.

"I am a good soldier, too, my love, I shall enjoy the campaign."

Her infinite arts induced him to believe that in fulfilling her wishes he fulfilled his own; she was, he thought, so clever; of course it would be a princely action to dazzle Haverbeck, to show him that he was a man and a ruler. To efface common memories of their childhood and youth when always Haverbeck had been the superior; yes, she was right, they would have a banquet, a review, and he would have all his troops and all his treasure out, and Madelon, in the Saxon diamonds he had had reset for her, could show the other man what he had missed; he became good-humoured upon these reflections and Madelon gently led his thoughts to the coming campaign and the fame and glory he could acquire there; he must go on the Rhine, she would lodge in the Palatinate in some castle if there was one the French had not ruined—eh, the spring, the war, blossom, and tuck of drum!

Johann Georg gazed at the precious objects displayed before him; he thought there was something sinister in all these queer forms, old devils, gods, and sirens, peering and mouthing in hard, costly, glittering gold, silver, crystal, heliotrope or marble.

"This is like the treasure hidden in the mountains where we rode near Lilienstein, Madelon."

He smiled uneasily and thought of the origin of much of this wealth, the magician's kitchen of Johann Georg I, where, by his infernal arts, he was enabled to manufacture gold.

Madelon laughed and showed him some smaller treasures on the cushion beside her; a Nuremberg watch (an egglike crystal showing all the delicate works), four little busts of Cæsars in a venturine, or yellow mica—another watch in the form of a cross that had belonged to an abbess—a reliquary with the monogram C. V. that had belonged to Charles Quint and showed in finest silver chiselling scenes from the Life and Passion of Jesus Christ.

Johann Georg flushed when he beheld this; it was not a plaything; she should not have handled it so lightly; he put it carefully aside.

"It is a Popish mummery," smiled Madelon; she trifled with his *"cadeaux de Noel"* to her; a golden egg, which, opened, revealed a coronet of pearls, diamonds and rubies mounted on a carnelian seal which showed a ship in tempest with the motto *"Constant Malgré L'orage,"* the crown could be detached to form a ring; the seal was hollow and filled with perfumes; inside the egg was enamelled with a flaming heart and the device *"Constant et Fidéle."*

Johann Georg eyed her, still uneasily. Why must she mingle sacred emblems with heathenish profanities?

He began to talk of the tricks of the witches daily discovered in Saxony; he was going, now, he said, to hear the report of the commission which had lately come back from Chemnitz; they had arrested six people.

"I'll not hear of it," said Madelon hotly, "it is cruel and stupid —it comes between me and my peace."

Johann Georg did not answer, he picked up a little figure in ivory crowned with Saxon amethyst—eh, a lovely face!

"Who is this?"

"Leda—you see the swan at the side."

He glanced at her oddly and dropped the jewel.

"Leda—that is what they call the picture—so like you, Madelon."

"Oh, yes—is this like me?"

"No. She was a witch. She loved a demon—the swan was a devil." He rose. "It is horribly tedious here—we'll go by sledge to Moritzburg tomorrow."

He kissed her and left her suddenly. Madelon looked after him without regret—ah, but she found it all tedious, amusing, coaxing, praising, soothing—and he so stupid, so dull and ignorant, poor youth . . . she, too, would be glad to get to Moritzburg in the open air, anywhere!

Madelon picked up an ancient gold mirror with a handle in the form of a harlequin that sparkled with rubies and looked at herself in the heavy, mellow light of the winter afternoon and studied the clear complexion that yet required no paint, no

powder, that had no lines to efface; there were no shadows to defy, no pallor to amend in the visage of twenty-one. There were those who thought that there was the hardness of a tinted statue in alabaster about the countenance of Madame Rocklitz, but none could deny that there was a radiance over her beauty not commonly found in women, her carnation had the brilliancy of a clear enamel and those wide-apart golden eyes were rare and admirable; the thin twisted masses of those saffron-coloured curls, which she wore high on her head in a coronal save for two long ringlets which hung down her long white neck, were in themselves a fortune. At present her beauty cost her no trouble, and would not for many years to come.

She put down the mirror indifferently and told her woman that Herr Knock was to be admitted the moment he came to her chamber. She added that the vases and statues and jewels were not to be moved, they were to be left on the shining carpet, she liked to see the glitter of them in the soft light of the stove, and had not yet decided their place in her apartments.

Close and gentle the snow beat at the window and the sound of the distant storm was muffled in the closely-scented sumptuous chamber as the Elector's mistress waited for the pastor.

Herr Knock was the President of the Consistory and therefore the head of the Lutheran Church in Saxony. He came into the presence of Madame Rocklitz with apprehension and dismay, yet with no faltering of fortitude; he knew himself a ruined man, and had his resignation in his pocket. . . . He might, on this score, have excused himself from the audience to which she had peremptorily summoned him; but there were things to say to this young woman that few save he could say, and he was not the man to shirk a duty.

He came into her presence firmly, and eyed with a disgust the trophies that strewed her floor, which, he thought, she had left there defiantly to impress him with her splendour and power, he eyed her, as he thought, without prejudice, and admitted her loveliness, yet she seemed to him to have but little charm of sweet womanly comeliness; and he thought that she had pleased

him more last winter when she had been but Fräulein von Neitschütz, humbly and modestly under the protection of that father, who had since proved himself so infamous.

Madame Rocklitz looked at him boldly. He was an elderly man of a robust habit—upright, honest and not censorious; generous in his dealings and incorruptible. Few such had been left in office during the reign of the House of Neitschütz.

She bid the clergyman sit down, and then she said, in her voice which had been carefully schooled on most occasions to an expressionless tone:

"Both of the Court divines have refused me absolution, sir; but I ask you, by the Elector's commands, to take off this ban."

The pastor had not accepted her permission to sit, he remained upright—a considerable and a dark figure among the bronze and silver, the gold and jasper, the sardonyx and onyx, the goblets and vases, tazzas and statues, standing, as if in mockery of his rectitude about the sumptuous day-bed of the favourite.

"Madame Rocklitz," he replied, quietly, "it is my purpose to resign from an office that has become odious to me. I have no doubt that you can find a successor who will be more compliant."

"But you have not resigned," objected the lady, "you are yet President of the Consistory, you have power to do as I request. Take off this ban on me."

"That I will not." He was firm. "When you repent, when you leave the Elector, you may have the absolution of the church. No honest pastor could give it you before. If thou shalt confess with thy mouth—thou shalt be saved."

"I am not in the wrong," said Madame Rocklitz, "I will not admit myself in the wrong. I was contracted to him before he was contracted to the Margravine of Anspach."

"Madame, I know that pretension."

"It is more than a pretension," said Madame Rocklitz. "I hoped you had heard of it. I wish it made public."

"Madame," replied Dr. Knock, "everyone has heard of it—they know, they say, that you aim at a divorce, and setting aside

this poor unhappy wronged lady, the Electress, and putting yourself in her place; and it may be done—with all the arts and influence you have. I do not say that it cannot be done in the eyes of man; but, in the eyes of heaven, never! They say, too, that you will endeavour to bring us all round to the idea of polygamy, that a prince may have two wives—that you are the righteous wife of the left hand. The Council of State has been approached with the idea of a morganatic union. In brief, madame, there are very strange consequences to be apprehended from your contention that there is nothing sinful in your connection with the Elector; *but fornication and all uncleanness, or wantonness, let it not be named among you.*"

"There is nothing sinful," insisted Madame Rocklitz.

She took from her bosom a paper which she handed to the pastor and bade him read it.

He cast his eye over this, which he believed, indeed almost knew, to be a forgery. It was dated a year ago, and signed by Johann Georg IV. In this paper the Elector declared that though no formal marriage had taken place between himself and Madame Rocklitz, but only a mutual promise before witnesses, he still acknowledged and held this to be a valid and true marriage inasmuch as the usual ceremony was only an addition of the church, and what they had gone through was equivalent to it. He further declared "that although the children which might result from this marriage are lawfully born, yet they shall remain, to avoid difficulties, excluded from all rights, claims and pretensions to the Electorate or the land, but shall content themselves with the title of count and such provision as he should make for them which should be honourable and worthy of the lady."

This professed declaration finished by the Elector declaring his intention of taking to himself a wife of equal rank to his own, "who is to bear the title of Electress and the children to succeed to the Electorate."

The pastor handed back to the lady this fantastic document, which, in his opinion, made her case the worse; he held it an

abominable and insolent forgery on the part of the House of Neitschütz to further increase the intolerable presumption of their pretensions and insult the unfortunate Electress.

"This will not do, madame," he declared sternly, "upon my honour this will not do."

She looked at him steadily and he saw a little colour creep into her clear skin.

"Your lover is the husband of the Electress," he added, "and none of your subtle sophistries will alter that. The wretched lady who is so neglected by her husband—"

"When he goes to her," smiled Madame Rocklitz, defiantly, "it is because I send him, every kindness she has, I give her."

The pastor, shaking his head sombrely, said again, "This will not do, madame, this will not do. You live in sin and in adultery, and every man and woman in Saxony knows it. Your name is a shame and a byword, you must have heard the shouts and seen the looks when you have driven abroad, while the Electress is loved and commiserated with. Your influence has been all for evil, for corruption and scandal and shame in high places which should be an example to the country, *when anybody has made boast of his own heart's desire . . . when anybody is so proud, that he careth not for God.*"

"Tell one of the court divines to give me absolution," said Madame Rocklitz, "and if they will not, find me a third."

"I will do neither, madame, until you have left this other woman's husband and express contrition for your sins, for the great scandal of your sins, for the open wantonness and profligacy of your life, *you have said in your heart, Tush, God hath forgotten.*"

"You take me then, you treat me as his harlot," smiled Madame Rocklitz, softly, leaning far from the rich day-bed.

"Madame, in all Saxony, in all the Empire, you have no other name, and you must know it, but that of the harlot of the Elector of Saxony."

"You are bold," she whispered. "You are the first to say that to my face."

"Yes, I am bold, madame, as I suppose. I have my resignation in my pocket—it matters not for that. The court is filled with your creatures and will be as long as you can hold him; but recall, *in this same net which they laid privately is their foot taken.*"

"You have refused me," said Madame Rocklitz, commanding herself, "and you must take the consequences. There will be a President of the Consistory who will see that I obtain absolution."

"And so you will mock God as you have mocked man," he replied, scornfully. "How do you think this will serve your conscience or your reputation? You must needs defile an altar to enable you to approach it—corrupt a pastor to force him to absolve you—where in this is your profit, and how do you salve even your pride, for people laugh and mock at you, even when they mop and bow to you?"

She looked at him and said in an absent voice:

"I suppose that is true, yes, that would be very true. I have noticed when I have gone abroad . . . But, no matter for that."

"May I take my leave, madame, you are very hardened in your sin, and, while the passion of the Elector lasts, very safe in it. But you are young, too, madame, and it may be there are years ahead of you. *'Upon the worldly He shall rain shame, fire and brimstone, storm and tempest—'*"

Madame Rocklitz interrupted:

"You may believe that I have faith in myself for all that. I counted all my hazards before I decided to play this game. I have made a man and a soldier of your prince, and I count him my husband."

"Then you amuse yourself with a lie," replied the pastor, sternly. "But I can tell you this, having some compassion for your extreme youth, and the evil of your bringing up, the foul company you kept with vicious brothers, and no mother—ah, do not wince and turn from me. Madame Rocklitz, all these things are known; you may be glad yet of a plain man's compassion."

"What is it you would tell me?" she demanded, haughtily, rising.

"I would tell you this: beware you do not push your influence over the Elector too far, nor flaunt it too boldly—you may be accused of bewitching him. . . . *'The Lord shall root out all deceitful lips and the tongue that speaketh proud things.'*"

Now she was moved, now she paled, at that one word, as at none of the other words that he had spoken.

"Bewitching him?" she repeated, frowning.

"People do begin to murmur it," replied the pastor; "now that they have seen you refused the offices of the church, they do think of you as something evil, and, as for his Highness himself, he is yet tender in his conscience and honest in his heart, and if this should come to his ears and he should once begin to suspect and fear you—"

"It will not be," interrupted Madame Rocklitz, sternly—"it shall never be. And as for being refused the offices of the church, I have said that is an insult I will not stand. Now you may go, sir, and send in your resignation."

He left her with no further word, or glance, or salutation—a ruined, an upright man.

"Help me, Lord, for there is not one godly man left."

Madame de Rocklitz stood alone among the treasures of the Elector of Saxony, not heeding them, nor the soft snow falling outside, tapping closely at the window-pane, nor the grey skies above Dresden, nor the muffled beat of the storm, thinking but of some half-forgotten incident of long ago . . . long ago, or last year? When she had heard of a woman having been taken to the Koenigsberg for enchanting a man who was not her husband; she had perished on the rack in the bloody darkness of the dungeon gloom—they say her limbs were wrenched apart in the torture, and fell out of their sockets. . . . Madame Rocklitz clasped her hands on her lovely bosom and peered round the splendid room. Refused absolution . . . driven out of the church . . . She had seen people shrink from her carriage as it passed through the streets. She had heard the names they

had called after her and seen the mud thrown on the bearings of the House of Neitschütz that blazed on her carriage panels. For the first time since she had come to Dresden she was afraid. "I must stop this persecution of the witches, I must turn his mind from that—Stürm must go, he fosters this . . . Oh, not that . . . He hated the Leda just now, he did not care to see me with the reliquary . . . Spanheim warned me."

She looked at the paper she had wrung out of Johann Georg and which Herr Knock had scorned . . . useless all these pretences and glosses on her shame.

She felt lonely and eyed by a wide, watchful circle of enemies; she pushed aside her plunder of treasure with disgust. She would put all this out of her mind and think only of Haverbeck; furtively she pulled from her bosom the little case that contained the scrap from the *Gazette*.

SIXTEEN

Major General von Neitschutz coarsely reproached his daughter for having arranged the visit of Haverbeck; Clement sneered and hoped she would be circumspect, Casimir vowed she was a sly young devil and could contrive to carry off any situation, and wished her, with gross good humour, good luck in her intrigue; all of them were afraid to cross her too openly.

The Envoy from Vienna arrived at the end of a stormy March, much delayed by bad roads and tempest. Count Spanheim, waiting at once at his lodging where everything was conducted on the most magnificent scale possible so that Imperial credit might stand high in the eyes of his new Allies, reminded him of the immediate necessity of paying court to the favourite. No one else in Dresden mattered. She, and she alone, had all influence and all power; so thought Spanheim, thinking to test the Envoy.

"You can be civil, of course, to the Electress, but it is the Countess Rocklitz that you must flatter—yet not too much," he added, with meaning.

"Leave me to handle the affair," said Haverbeck; "it is but three days and I am gone again. I have leave to look after my poor estates before I return," he added, by way of excuse before Spanheim's astonishment at the announcement of the shortness of his visit. "Politics are distasteful to me, and I had not come at all save for the Emperor's absolute commands."

This was not true. The Emperor's absolute commands would not have forced Haverbeck to come to Dresden had he not wished to do so. But his reasons for consenting to come to Dresden were not such as he could tell Spanheim, nor indeed that he dare dwell on himself.

Haverbeck did not immediately see the Countess Rocklitz; he waited formally on the Elector and found him but little changed in the six months since he had last seen him. Johann Georg stared him up and down and tried to be gracious, and signed the papers which committed him to the Alliance; he spoke of the campaign in the coming spring and requested his presence at a banquet, a ball, and a parade of troops, and took him to visit the Electress, to whom Haverbeck offered a present of ivory carvings, light as a feather, from the hand of his Majesty the Emperor Leopold himself.

Count Spanheim was for carrying him, immediately after this, to the apartments of the Rocklitz. The Imperial Envoy refused, saying:

"Why, I shall see her at the banquet tonight and tomorrow on the parade ground; believe me, I can make my peace with her."

Spanheim looked at him, fixed and stealthy, wondering if there was, after all, anything behind this visit which the Rocklitz had requested in such peremptory tones, and to which Haverbeck had acceded so easily, and if there was likely to be some indiscretion or folly—who could tell with a woman, and a young woman?—that might cast some shadow over her power and glory, and if he had better go carefully in consequence, and not commit himself too deeply to her party. Well, the Alliance was signed and the troops would be in the field, so there was little need to trouble for the moment—if it was not the Rocklitz, it would be another woman; he had tried to warn her and she had gone her own way, and now the man was here and there seemed nothing in it. . . .

Count Spanheim ate heartily and slept soundly and troubled himself no more about the affair.

The State banquet was set out with the utmost show and magnificence. All the plate of gold and silver, of crystal, of jewels and enamel, were brought up from the green cellars and set upon the great table. The Elector, flushed, hot, and powdered, his bright gold hair in precise ringlets, sat under the canopy with the Electress at his side. She who could not—

unfortunate lady—be either easy or happy found some consolation in the formal recognition given to her claims, the kind of secret sympathy and respect which she could observe in the faces of all those who dared to show it. Though she was plain she had some figure and could carry the Electoral jewels handsomely, sit erect on her rightful seat and answer compliments with an air of breeding, disguising gracefully her trouble and her shame. On the right of the Elector, who wore the parade dress of honours of the princes of Saxony—diamonds, clasps, buckles and sword-hilt, his Order of the Garter and his Polish Eagle and Prussian Eagle—sat Marshal von Neitschütz in all his overbearing arrogance with the perilous glance of pride in his faded light golden eyes, deep set beneath his shaggy brows—even in this company a loud-voiced flaunting man, at once sullen and violent. Near him in places of honour were his two sons—Clement, with his scar purple across his pale face, handsome in a cold and heartless fashion, with his great key as chamberlain of the royal household; Casimir, in a general's bravery, leering and grinning, half-drunk already, while chief amongst the women was the Countess Rocklitz, taking precedence as a member of the Electoral College, and with a fortune squandered on her gown and jewels—not speaking much, or smiling much, bearing herself like the empress of them all, everyone inclining towards her and flattering her with deference and admiration. There was no one like her in the whole room for show of beauty, and many who did not love her and many who even hated her admitted in their hearts that it was not likely there would be another like her for show of beauty in any country, at any court.

She pulled a hothouse rose to pieces and floated its red petals in a goblet of white wine, and holding this thoughtfully to her lips stared up the table towards the place where Marshal de Haverbeck, the plenipotentiary from His Imperial Majesty the Emperor, sat close to the Elector's hand. Of all those there he was the one who looked at her the least—his attention was all for the Elector. Afterwards in the ballroom she sent for him

and he was brought to her formally by Count Spanheim, again uneasy at this summons, in the alcove where she sat in front of tall mirrors which reflected her beauty again and again.

"I did not think you would come so easily to Dresden," she whispered, in an interval of the light music which was played from the gallery above—fine, wistful, exquisite melodies.

"Why should I not return to Dresden?" smiled Haverbeck, and he told her that his mission and the desire he had to see his estates in his native country, together with private business of his own in the city, were too long neglected. "And it is only a day or so and I am gone again."

He spoke with indifferent formality as if they had never met before and like enough would never meet again, as if this were but some chance and formal presentation on some barren great occasion.

Madame Rocklitz had arrayed herself for him, she knew that she was a thousand times more beautiful than the little Madelon for whom he had asked thrice.

She impelled him to look at her. She said:

"Delphicus, we cannot wear masks for one another—you and I."

"I wear no mask, and, if you do, I do not perceive it."

"You look unfamiliar in that uniform, I am used to seeing you in the Saxon colours. Tell me of your success."

"Such as they are," replied Haverbeck, quietly, "you may read of them in the *Gazette*."

"And you have nothing to add for my ear?"

"I have nothing to add, why, no."

She studied him intently and anxiously; every line of his face was hers by heart. There was little change in his dark countenance, save that something of his bloom had gone; he seemed older, sterner; lines of fatigue were beneath his eyes; he wore the rewards of his valour and good fortune in the collars and chains on his breast, in the brilliancy of his field-marshal's uniform. His elegant and manly shape set off this handsome costume, his brilliancy was his own and not dependent on his stars and

crosses, his epaulettes and gold lace and knotted sash; the martial high-bred gentleman was well suited to carry off the highest honours.

The music began again, harmonious and regretful the violins sounded across the great ballroom, where the people moved to and fro constrained by formality and the official pageantry of the State occasion; Madame Rocklitz gazed at herself in the mirrors about her, now this, now that—all round her mirrors clamped together with bronze lions' heads—looking over her white shoulders at her lovely, spirited, delicately-tinted face and that saffron hair, unmatchable, that golden glance of all imaginable potency—was she not a siren, a magic creature, a fairy, a dream within a dream to most men? Had she not set herself out with every brilliancy and possible adornment, rich extravagance of white velvet and flashes of cascades of diamonds, such as had only been worn before by princes and princesses, costly laces on her full bosom, wreaths of pearls round her delicate arms? She could do no more, she could imagine no more, than any woman could do.

And he stood there, indifferent; he seemed to listen to the music in a quiet and melancholy mood, and did not trouble to glance away from her, but gazed at her as if she were but an ordinary bedizened creature; in her ears Madame Rocklitz seemed to hear Pastor Knock's stern words:

"It will not do, madame, upon my honour, it will not do."

She rose, wishing she had not sent for Haverbeck, feeling that this was going to be more difficult than anything she had yet attempted; a folly to call him from Vienna, a folly to hope—all risked for nothing!

Marshal de Haverbeck, taking her movement as his dismissal, left her with no more than civility.

The Elector found Madame Rocklitz alone in the mirrored alcove and took her away imperiously to the gaming tables set out in the next painted room, and there she remained till it was well into the night and did not see Haverbeck again, for by the time the play was over he had gone to his lodgings.

The next day was the review; beneath the wintry blue of the fairest day that had been known for many weeks Madame Rocklitz rode on a great white horse in the uniform of the Guards, attired like a man, save for the green skirt that flowed over the horse's side, with cockade and gauntlets, cord and cravat, with no feminine rivals now, the cynosure of all the glances, scornful, admiring, wondering and a little afraid, of all the men gathered on the parade-ground.

She rode superbly up and down beside the Elector as he inspected the ranks; she sat superbly beside him as his cavalry and his infantry went past. Of all those there who were constantly—and some of them against their wills—considering her, none observed her with a keener scrutiny than Ferdinand Stürm, wrapped in a winter cloak fur-lined, sitting in his little basket-carriage and who remained very much in the background, apart from the more favoured ministers and warriors. He marked her beauty, her courage, her dashing gallant air, and her fine horsemanship, the grace and elegance of her figure, the ease with which she faced her intolerable position—there was no man who had a keener appreciation for all these graces in the lady; he saw her draw up her horse by Haverbeck and lean towards him and speak to him, pointing with her whip towards the marching ranks, seeming to ask his approbation of their fitness for war, saw her indicate the standard with the insignia of Saxony going by in the keen winter air and perturbed a little by the sharp winter breeze in its heavy silken folds. He saw the handsome Envoy, erect and formal on his big bay steed, take but little heed of all these courtesies and bear himself stiffly as a man who puts through his official duty with but little pleasure; Stürm thought, as he clutched his fur warp round him and shivered in his invalidish way in the keen nipping air.

"I'll have her watched, day and night will I have her watched."

She rode away with the Elector, the white cockade on her brow adding to her stature, her yellow hair hanging like a peruke on her shoulders, her heavy scowling father, her flaunting insolent brothers, behind her.

The whole court was in disorder because she had been refused absolution by the court divines, who had been supported by the Consistory and the Council of State. Pastor Knock had resigned and it was difficult to find a man to take his place who would be pliant enough to agree that it was an outrageous scandal that the offices of the church should be refused to Madame Rocklitz. All the city knew of this and among the crowd which waited and watched the pageantry and the spectacle go past there were many keen eyes, and many sneering looks, and many foul names muttered. Madame Rocklitz had her head high and her face serene, fair-coloured, pale, exact above them all. She looked more a prince than the Elector, who appeared uneasy, scowling, and violent. Stürm guessed that it cost him something thus to expose himself and his mistress to the irony, the scandal, the ill-will of Dresden; he was partially proud, partially ashamed of this beautiful woman riding fearlessly beside him in her almost masculine attire.

As the cavalcade passed she was pointed out, one to another—"The Rocklitz—see, the Rocklitz."

Few of the men could condemn that lovely face, few of the women pity it.

"The Rocklitz, ah, look, the Rocklitz, there she goes!" Well, a prince must have his mistresses, but this one was shameless, and her power over him unnatural—she of an ancient house, too, and so young—educated by that Frenchwoman who kept an ill-famed house now and dealt in drugs—eh, the Rocklitz, the Rocklitz—the Electress barren, too; perhaps she knows something of that; there were spells could blast the unborn—what of the dead child in the tree? Look how proud and bold she is—can't His Highness see that that is not a mortal face? Poor, fond, bewitched gentleman, how can he purge Saxony of witches with her by his side?

Dr. Knock has resigned and all the God-fearing clergy have left the court—the Rocklitz . . . the Rocklitz . . . so pale, eager; fearful glances, prying, peering glances followed the girl on the great white horse that stepped gently and proudly through the

wintry streets; now and then she glanced down at the close-pressed hostile faces, the curious malicious eyes on either side of her way, but she kept her countenance and discovered neither fear nor trouble.

That afternoon the Imperial Envoy prepared to set about his own business. He had some private matters to attend to in Dresden; now that his papers were signed, his compliments paid, now that he had been at the banquet, the ball and the parade, he was free to attend to these same affairs which, he insisted on to himself, were the main motives for his return to Dresden. It was, in a manner, his native city; a creature dear to him was living in the suburbs.

Haverbeck, therefore, took off his heavy State uniform, his sashes, his sword-belt, stars and collars, and put on a plain travelling attire such as any gentleman of no great note might wear, and was about to set out on his errand when a letter was brought him by a young lad, wearing no livery (as his servant informed him), who had gone without waiting for a reply or giving a name.

Haverbeck thought at once: "She has written."

But the note was not in her hand; it was on but a common piece of paper, fastened by a dab of wax that bore no seal.

He broke this and found a few lines written in an odd and, as he thought, a disguised script.

The writer of this believed "that the Marshal de Haverbeck will be going this afternoon near to the cottage he once owned on the Bächnitz road, if when he had done his errand in this neighbourhood he will turn into the little church—the Marien-kirche—he knows of near by, where there is a tomb which is most familiar to him, he will meet a young gentleman who has matters of great concern to discuss with him, and he is prayed—and this is a matter meaning more than life or death—not to fail in the appointment."

Haverbeck had no secrets and could not think of anyone who might be at an intrigue with him in Dresden, or should be concerned in this dark way at coming to an interview with him,

for he was there openly and everyone knew his name and his lodgings, he being for the moment the most considerable stranger in the city. This letter seemed mysterious to him, and more mysterious still that the writer should know of his intentions for that afternoon.

It was in the direction of the cottage he had once owned near Bächnitz that he was going and his business lay, as the writer surmised, in that immediate neighbourhood. It had also been his intention to turn into that church and glance, if but for a moment or so, at a certain tomb there, which was, as the writer had supposed, tolerably familiar to him.

He was not to be put aside from that intention by this letter—which he thought bold and silly, and he went about his business as he had intended; when he had ridden out to the suburb and seen the people who were the object of his visit, made all his arrangements, paid down money and heard reports, which were all satisfactory and pleasing, he rode away into the wintry afternoon round by that shuttered house near Bächnitz, where the poplars were bare in the garden and the empty cottage looked melancholy behind the barren vineyards; Haverbeck turned away through a scatter of houses in a narrow street, and came to the little church in a field, which stood apart from the dwellings.

The brown furrows of grass blackened by frost were bleak beneath the sky which had lost its attractive blue and was grey and overclouded.

Haverbeck rode past the church searching for a place to leave his horse, and found a small inn where he dismounted and gave the animal in charge of an ostler.

A sprinkle of snow was falling from the light moving clouds. The church stood on slightly rising ground, and, as Haverbeck ascended this incline, he could see the river below, grey and turbid, and washing heavily at its banks, the horizon blotted out with the heavy darkness of snow-clouds. He took off his hat in the porch and went into the church; he believed it was empty

and that his anonymous correspondent had failed at the strange appointment.

It was a poor church and somewhat faded in its garnishings, but the gilt on the organ-case was bright enough—above the organ was a row of angels, like dolls, vividly coloured in red and blue, with straight outstretched gilt wings.

On the walls were many tablets and monuments of carved and coloured woods, of foliated and scrolled Saxon marble and stone, but none very costly or gaudy, and many defaced and decayed. The church was dark, the fading of the winter day cast great shadows. His step rang hollowly over the vaults beneath as he advanced to the familiar stone which he had come to see; this was a light shaft or pyramid within the chancel; as he approached it he saw the figure, hitherto obscure in the shadows, of a young man who might have been a clerk or a student, pacing up and down in a thoughtful way and shuddering into a heavy mantle which concealed his hair (that was caught in a buckle) and was folded across his breast in a manner that shrouded the lower part of his face. But this pitiful disguise deceived Haverbeck, however, for not an instant. As he advanced towards the stranger he knew that it was Madame Rocklitz, and such a grief and compassion came over him that he had to stand silent and look away, endeavouring to control the beat and agitation of his spirit . . . it seemed to him that all the world had turned lunatic, and that he was in an established frenzy.

SEVENTEEN

With great composure of behaviour Madame Rocklitz smiled at Haverbeck.

"If you had known it was I you would not have come," she stated.

And he replied with a serenity equal to her own, but with a feeling and cutting regret:

"Truly, I had not come to see you thus expose yourself to weakness, or humour, or affectation—I know not which it may be."

"It is none of these," replied Madame Rocklitz, "and you know it. See what a meeting place is here."

She put her hand on the marble beside her, which was to the memory of Angelique the dancer, and bore the Latin epitaph that he had written with his own hand that stormy night last June.

"How did you know of this?" asked Haverbeck, with some uneasiness.

"I have had for some time complete power," she replied, "and been able to gratify my curiosity. I have discovered all I need to know about your affairs and interests in Dresden, and of the house where you lived and of this grave, and it was not difficult to guess that you would come here this afternoon, for I hear that you intend to leave Dresden tomorrow."

"There is nothing," said he, "to keep me."

Madame Rocklitz, who looked but more than a boy, nay, but little more than a child in her male attire, walked up and down in front of the pyramid of white marble which showed ghastly in the enclosed, shadowed, and livid light and asked:

"All quite extinguished—no hope left—no foundation to build upon?"

"We consume our time," replied Haverbeck, quietly, "in great waste; and you, madame, I think, face some danger in being here in this disguise. It must be that you have enemies and it is likely you are watched."

"Leave that," replied Madame Rocklitz negligently, "never was any safer than I. You had two opportunities to speak to me and would not, but now you must."

She added, hurriedly:

"I say I know of your affairs, they have been under my observation. You see this marble, it has been cleaned and cherished; in the spring wreaths of flowers will hang here—to her memory—Carlotta Drexel and your love."

He did not answer, and she continued:

"Why did you come? You had no reason, no need—why did you come to Dresden?"

"I came," he replied, "because I had some duty here, and that ran with the Emperor's charge, and because there was no reason why I should stay away, Madame Rocklitz."

She moved her cloak, which seemed to impede her breathing, which was difficult enough, and fumbled with the clasp, to set it wider on her breast, so that her lovely shadowed face was set clear against the high collar of fur, and the plain masculine cravat of folded lawn.

"You have not forgotten Arnsdorf, and the visit you made there?" she said. "Those times are the standard of my happiness. If there were any defects or disorders then in my life, I have forgotten them."

"Our lives are as we make them," said Haverbeck, "our days take colour from our actions."

"Arnsdorf is deserted now," added Madame Rocklitz, in a low tone. "My father and my brothers have grander mansions and finer estates, and I—I could not well endure to return there."

"Why do you speak about Arnsdorf?" he demanded sternly, "and the days that have gone?—which are scarcely to be remembered without shame."

"What else can I speak of?" she replied, hurriedly. "What can I talk of—I must make some device to detain you here—nay, not to detain you here, for the place is but a charnel-house and we stand over the dead."

"It were best that you returned to Dresden by whatever secret way you came," said Haverbeck. "Do not put yourself in peril, and for nothing."

"Give me," she replied, "a little time. You may do that and not stoop too low. I was happy once, and it was snatched from me, early and suddenly."

"Madelon!" cried Haverbeck, with a pain that had become too sharp for concealment, "what can we either of us say one to the other that will not increase that dark and bitter regret that now haunts and possesses both?"

Madame Rocklitz, in a broken inarticulate language of sighs, moved towards the church door, and he could not but follow her.

There she spoke, pulling on her broad-leafed hat and drawing it over her brows:

"We must walk awhile in the fields. See, we shall be visible to none: because of the chill weather none are abroad—and who is there here to know you or me?"

The clouds were overspreading the last glimmerings of light in the sky, and the snow was falling thicker, staying for a second on the dun-coloured furrows, then vanishing into the earth.

"The grass withereth and the flower fadeth," quoted Madame Rocklitz, with a faint and awful smile, "what are we but as the flowers of the field, though I may have more heat and lustre than others I shall soon be as low as the lowest. See how this spot of ground is decked with death, graves and stones that tell of loss and mourning! Look at the sky so wintry and so sad, and all these blighted fields, and the grey river that seems to tumble to oblivion! Look on this and turn, my beloved, to life!"

She spoke these words in the softest whisper, looking towards him and leaning on his arm. But Haverbeck clasped his hands behind his back so that she was deprived of his support and must proceed alone.

Walking without direction, they came to the bank of the river where there was a small path lined with broken reeds and set with gnarled willow trees: there they paced up and down under the light snow of the low sky in the increasing dusk.

"I will not ease myself by vain complaints," said Madame Rocklitz, passionately. "You may guess that since I sent you away my life has not been so agreeable."

Haverbeck glanced at her through the chilly dusk:

"I am astonished at our common fate," he sighed; "that we two should be walking here now and talking thus and talking vainly."

"Vainly," repeated Madame Rocklitz, "not vainly: you must not judge me as you would another woman. I have been ambitious—you should understand that—my father, my brothers too—"

Haverbeck appeared greatly troubled. He looked at the river, and said in a low voice:

"Your father and your brothers—you make them responsible?"

"No," she denied that, resolutely, "they would never have thought of it—'twas I who sold myself the night I sent you away—because you had gone, because we were ruined—because I did not properly understand."

"And you have had your price, I suppose?" he said bitterly: "there is no more to be said. Let us return to Dresden, Madelon, and take up our lives: indeed, I was at fault to leave Vienna."

"You would have stayed away if you could," she replied, with a note of wild triumph in her voice, "but you could not—you had to come: all these months you have been thinking of me, as I of you. When I sent the summons you had to come, my love."

He did not answer, and they paced side by side up and down the snow-smitten path, wrapped in their cloaks—the barren fields one side and the grey river the other, the low-banked grey clouds overhead, a little wind whistling close and bitter about their ears, and the icy flakes on their mantles.

She peered up at his dark face, at the outline and colour of it,

the dearer to her, the more cherished in her heart because of the shadow of suffering and fatigue she saw there.

"You have been successful," she said, "you have been triumphant—and may be a prince."

"Did I not tell you I knew my fortune would be high, Madelon," he answered, quietly, "did I not tell you, and ask you to share it?"

She paused in her pacing, as if suddenly and completely exhausted, and begged him in a tone that implored compassion to lend her his arm, to help her over the heavy ground.

But he would not touch her, and answered:

"You cannot beguile me, Madelon, in truth, you cannot beguile me. You've touched a spring which is broken, and set no machinery in motion. Let me take you to the inn and give you a glass of wine, for you look chilled and, I daresay, are fatigued, and set you on your road to Dresden."

"And tomorrow you are to leave?" whispered Madame Rocklitz, "tomorrow you are to go away?"

"And no inducement," he replied, "will ever bring me on any errand to Dresden again."

"They talk of your marriage; is there any truth in that?"

"I am engaged on no marriage, but it may be that I shall soon seek an establishment."

"But you will never forget that you loved me," cried Madame Rocklitz, "you'll never forget that, Delphicus."

"I have forgotten already," he replied, sadly. "I remember some shadow of a shadow of a dream, but it is forgotten in my best and clearest hours."

She gazed at him again, and thought of the love engagements he might have had that last winter and she not know of them, of the women he might be going back to now in Vienna, in Budapest—she knew not where, and the competition there must be for his graces, for his favours and his caresses, and she those miles away . . . Now, this moment—her little moment over—so soon over—while they walked together by the river, and he as cold as the snow that fell on them.

"It will soon be wholly dark," said Haverbeck, "we cannot remain here."

He turned aside from the river to cross the fields and she followed him to the inn where he had left his horse.

There he asked for the parlour, and they entered the small room at the back, where the thick kitchen candles with a common wick were hastily lit. The landlord stared a little curiously at the two gentlemen who were of a quality that did not often visit his beer-house: but neither Haverbeck nor Madame Rocklitz was in a mood to notice his glances.

She could not drink the wine they set before her, it choked in her throat. She sat down at the table, and with her hands clasped before her on the rough stained board, entreated for his kindness and his compassion.

"Close your eyes to what I have done, to what I am—think of me only as someone who has always loved you, and that's true enough, Delphicus, that's all the truth I've ever known, I think. Why did you go away—why did you let me be such a jealous little fool—why did you not force me off with you then? I did not know. I did not understand."

"Madelon," he interrupted, quietly, "make an end of this; what you put between us ended love and almost compassion."

"No," cried Madame Rocklitz. Her eyes were half-closed, her elbows on the table, her fingers pushing up her bright and tangled gold hair. "No, not past compassion. You cannot realize what I suffer. I am afraid, I am haunted, I am terrified! because I think that life is going by and all the good it might offer with it. If you never loved me, I might as well have never been born, for it is but a spilling out of beauty and a wastage of days and nights, a mocking of the sunshine. And can you," she cried, opening her eyes on him, "hear me say that with the dry sullenness of a stoic?"

"You talk," said Haverbeck, sadly, "and I do not hear you—your voice no longer means anything to me, Madame Rocklitz: and it seems to me there is no command on me to pity

you—you have chosen deliberately and been well rewarded for your choice."

He turned away in a sudden hurry and impatience, and she feared that he would be gone, so cried out and stayed him at the door.

"And you believe, perhaps, that I tried to entrap you here for a light jest or folly?"

"And if I did," he answered, with a distension of his nostrils and a lift of his lips, which gave a hard look to his dark face, "would it not be warranted by your general character, which has mists and clouds so thick upon it as to block out any sparkle of tenderness I once may have held?"

She stared, startled at these words which were as the words of one who has gone past reproach and anger and become indifferent, yes, staring at him, listening to him, she was forced to believe that he was indifferent.

"I do advise you," urged Haverbeck, in tones of quiet courtesy, "to return before you put yourself in peril, though I doubt not you have your ways of coming and going, and will smile at my poor advice."

Madame Rocklitz sprang up, only retaining sufficient self-command to hush her voice, remembering that she was in a public place.

"Delphicus, you must not speak to me so coldly—do you not see I am in despair? Frightened? Did you not observe the people today? How they glared at me as I rode past? 'The Rocklitz, the Rocklitz,' I heard them say, as if it was a curse."

Haverbeck returned to the table.

"Hush, Madelon, you will betray yourself. Why should you be frightened? You have your father, your brothers, the creatures you have attached to yourself."

"But all depends on me. Supposing *he* tires of me."

"There are other men, Madelon—many men who would give you everything."

"But not you?"

"I never wanted you in that way." He spoke tenderly and

that was terrible to Madame Rocklitz, for his kindness seemed to be for a weak wretched woman, not for Madelon: he was concerned for her, tried to get her to drink the wine, urged her to compose herself, feared she would be ill. "If he still loved me," thought she, "he would not be so gentle": yet his mere compassion was better than his departure.

"You do not know how I have to scheme and defy. They have outcast me from the church, you know, and this witchcraft—"

"Hush," he put his hand on hers as they trembled before him, outstretched in anguish and clasped them firmly. "This is a sharp and unnecessary distress, Madelon. Perhaps I was too harsh. There was no need. Indeed I pity you, poor child. But I believe you wrong the Elector—I think he loves you, and that is more than you deserve, poor Madelon. Yes, my dear, he loves you and will never see you affronted or suffering."

"Loves me? I don't know. It is like an obsession, a charm, everyone says so—sometimes he feels it himself—sometimes he seems afraid of me—and I"—she snatched her hands away and put them to her face—"am nothing but his slave—in his power, at his service always—and I feel sick, sick and begin to loathe him."

Haverbeck endeavoured to soothe, to comfort her, but in a detached, impersonal way that increased her agony: she knew he had the kindest of hearts and was quickly moved to pity—and so he might have spoken to any beggar in an endeavour to ease a misery that was past relief.

"Am I no longer Madelon to you?" she demanded desperately. "Cannot you forget these six months and see me as I was last summer?"

"That is impossible. And you know it—come, you have more fortitude than this, Madelon—and more sense. No one can efface the past—by an iota. I hope this is but a gust of humour—for you are a slight, light creature—tomorrow you will have forgotten—come, look up, and get back to Dresden."

"You speak to me," she returned hoarsely, "as if I was a poppet —I am a woman, who loves you."

"You deceive yourself," he replied, sadly; "you never loved me, my dear, or you would have come with me on any terms— no matter what your brother said—you sneered at me, Madelon. I have tried to forget it, but too often I see your face with that look on it—I knew then there was no hope for us."

"I was jealous," sobbed Madame Rocklitz dryly in her throat. "Jealous!"

"Of my poor little mistress, whom I never placed in the same sphere with you—and you never waited to hear what I could say about that—and even then she was dead."

"I did not know—I did not know."

"Had you loved me, you had trusted me, surely. I have never been a profligate, nor sunk in debauchery. Angelique was honest and kind and my relations with her, not vile. You could hardly have had a suitor, Madelon, whose youth had been less entangled."

"I did not know. I did not know."

"Well, good-bye to you, Madelon. Contrive it so that we do not meet again. I shall go to my estates tomorrow, and, it may be, straight to Vienna."

"What shall I do?" she whispered as if to herself. "What shall I do?"

"Be constant to your lover," he advised, "snatch at least fidelity out of it; surely, if you remain faithful to him you'll ease your own conscience—there is much good in him, and he trusts you, Madelon, completely."

He left her on that with such abruptness that she had no time for words or movement.

She heard him depart—a sound that she had been dreading to hear for hours, then rose stiffly, in full command of herself again, and adjusted her disguise, hid her hair in the collar of her cloak, pulled down her hat and left the inn, and walked steadily to the place where she had appointed her heavily-fed groom to meet her with her horse. It was not the first time that she had been to

this suburb, she had often paid visits to a small mansion and to an empty house by the little Marienkirche on the Bächnitz road. There was no reason why the man should associate this visit of hers with Marshal de Haverbeck. She felt, therefore, safe with him, and would so have felt had she been in any mood to consider any manner of safety. As it was she dismissed him when, the dark full on them, they reached Dresden, told him to take the horses secretly to the Marstall, and did not return either to her own house in the city or go to her apartments in the Residenzschloss, but hurried on foot to a side street which had an ugly reputation and knocked at the decorous front of a tall blank-fronted house, which was known to be the abode of many forms of dishonour and even crime.

When the heavy door was opened by a trim and cautious maid, Madame Rocklitz asked for one of the mistresses of this terrible establishment—Françoise de Rosny; the favourite was recognized and admitted instantly. It was not the first time she had been there, but never before so late at night, so wild a disguise, on so impossible an errand. Hitherto she had taken cold, fearful, shuddering and distant notice of the particular hells in which Madame de Rosny moved; now she felt like one who craves a bold freedom and an absolute liberty in ghastly regions.

Madame de Rosny sat over a clear glowing fire in the neat greenish parlour, and worked precisely at a tambour frame. She seemed a decent quiet gentlewoman in her dark hood and linen bands, with her neat russet skirt and long mittened hands; her ash-coloured grim features lightened with a chill expectancy when she saw Madame Rocklitz enter—without cloak and hat now, with her curls flowing in masculine fashion on to her shoulders and bosom and looking, to Madame de Rosny's shrewd amused glance, like a lovely copy of Casimir when he was in his first youth, almost his childhood, and had first come to this house to learn degradation, vice and ruin.

"I'm cold," muttered Madame Rocklitz, wildly, "I'm cold," and she huddled over the fire and stretched out her small hands.

Madame de Rosny noticed how her ruffles were shaking at her wrists.

"You are in trouble?" enquired the governess, quietly, slipping her needle in and out of the canvas. "I glanced at you at the review today—I was there among the crowd as one of your humble subjects, and thought you seemed peaked high enough up, Madelon."

"An outcast must use an outcast's weapons," muttered Madame Rocklitz, staring into the fire.

The Frenchwoman nodded and murmured:

"Ay, ay, so I have always heard—so I have always acted. You have been a prude and a simpleton, but you've changed your mind now, eh?"

"If there was anything in it," cried the Rocklitz, "I'd do it."

She stared past her own shaking hands, which she was endeavouring to warm, into the steadiness of the clear flames.

"But there's nothing, it is but superstition and a madness—the trash at which I always laughed."

The ancient gentlewoman worked steadily with her flashing needle and retired into her grey hood which shadowed her flaccid face.

"You are in some trouble or distress?" she suggested. "After so short a time and when you seemed so secure! Do his affections pale, or his passion flag, Madelon?"

Madame Rocklitz stood up and leant against the mantelboard. The firelight in her saffron-yellow hair was like a rain of flame around her pale and lovely face.

"No one," she breathed in a low whisper, "thinks I can fall lower than I have fallen; however well I may carry it, I know they think that, and some of them have said it. Pastor Knock did not hesitate—he told me the name the people called me."

"Not one name, but many," smiled the governess, rocking herself slightly to and fro as the needle flashed in and out the frame. "And who's to care for that—what have they but their envy and spite and malice? But you—you have all the pleasure of the world—"

"It's not only pleasure I want," muttered the Rocklitz, "and if I thought that you could help me to it—what does another degradation matter? You said that it was not all folly and trumpery, that there was something in it, eh, you said that, did you not?"

"What do you want, my dear, what do you want?" asked Madame de Rosny; she pushed her hood back a little and stared at the Rocklitz and then laughed—a gross and bitter laugh; Madame Rocklitz turned at this sound and gazed at the erect, decent, russet and grey-hooded figure in the high-backed chair.

"I mean," she said, "that if among your drugs and potions there was one that could make a man love a woman, or make a man who does love a woman already unlock his soul and tell her so—"

"Well, if there was," said Madame de Rosny, still chuckling silently; she laid her work down on her knees and placed her long knotted fingers on top of it, drumming on the tambour frame; "if there was such a drug, you would give a good price for it, I daresay—as many women would, I suppose; the men aren't all so easy and loving, and they tire, too—there is many a lover held by charms—but the price is high—and many pay it."

"But few could as I would," whispered Madame Rocklitz. "I have the key to the Elector's vaults, and he neither knows nor cares what I might take away and sell, and I have a pension now from the Allies—money is being poured into my lap, Madame de Rosny, more than I know what to do with—money and jewels and chances, and offices to sell . . . I could give you for any such drug, if it be not trash and trumpery to think of such a thing, as I have heard—"

She paused, panting, and gazed half puzzled into the older woman's gross face.

"You used to teach me such a deal of matter, cannot you teach me this?"

The light was steady in the neat, quiet parlour, so warmly curtained from the winter night, clear light of fire and lamp over both of them.

Madame de Rosny leaned forward and peered into the anxious countenance so near to her own:

"Delphicus de Haverbeck," she smiled. "I knew it would come to this. And you want a drug to stir his stoic blood, eh? And something to put on the other's handkerchief lest he should wake too soon, or does not sleep soon enough?"

"I never said that," shuddered the Rocklitz, "I never said a word of that—I'll get free of him some other way; but I've only got tonight. He, the other one, will go tomorrow; and I have felt somehow free of all restraint, all shame. I doubt he loves me, he was too tender, too sorry, but if I could, but for half an hour, lie in his arms—"

Madame de Rosny neatly and quietly folded up her work.

"As well to take all precautions then. There's a cold man to be inflamed, a jealous man to be quietened, eh?"

"I thought," breathed Madame Rocklitz, with her hands to her forehead, "I could have done it without your help, but not, it seems. I saw him today, and I could not rouse him—he has seen me paraded in splendour, he has seen me humbled—and still he is indifferent. Tomorrow he leaves Dresden. I have only tonight. . . ."

"So hot in love?" sneered the ancient governess. "And you might have had him once. And now you say he's cold, eh? I always detested him—he plays at virtue. It would be quite agreeable to help bring him down."

"Can it be done?" asked the Rocklitz, her fingers on her lips. "I could contrive to get him to my house tonight . . . if the other were asleep."

"You can make him sleep easily enough, Madelon. But all this is very dangerous. I have to be extremely careful . . . the frostbitten bigots are always nosing round for witches, as they term any woman of spirit and learning; it is hardly safe to be anything but a fool nowadays. I do not say that I have not got such medicines, but you are wild to ask for them. And I wonder if I can trust you, frantic as you seem."

The Frenchwoman spoke this in a quick whisper, leaning for-

ward, and now and then furtively peering round her hood as if she dreaded, even in her own abode, to be overheard, as if she debated with herself as to whether or no she was committing a stupidity in listening to the girl . . . but, the key of the green vaults. . . . While this madness lasted she could get some plunder and be over the frontier into Bavaria, where the police were not so vigilant and there was no scare of witchcraft.

"Surely," whispered the Rocklitz, "if once he loved me, once embraced me, he could never leave me again, surely I could hold him if once he even kissed me—and even if not, even if he left me in disgust in the morning . . . anything rather than that he should leave me like this—stoic, kind, indifferent—do you hear, anything?"

Madame de Rosny rose and, with dry fingers, flicked her stiff russet dress into precise folds.

"You were always rather perverse," she said, in a tone of rebuke; "I had that difficulty with you from the first. What you want to do is very dangerous; and why can't you be satisfied? The Elector is a proper man and as comely as the other, and if you give rein to your wayward liking you will have to go more warily than any woman ever can to my knowledge."

"I will be careful," pleaded Madame Rocklitz, in a low, hurried whisper; "I'm not the first to have to do with these dangerous affairs, and I've got skill and cleverness more than I have ever used. No one knows how besotted he is with me. If it were more difficult than it is I am impelled to do it. There is no harm, it is but a drug, you say?"

The other woman did not reply to any of this.

"You're sure you've not been watched?" she demanded sharply. "You saw the man this afternoon, wasn't that dangerous?"

"No, no; I have a certain liberty to go about. *He* is occupied with business today. I shall be back before he misses me—"

"And tonight—if he asks for you?"

"You said—I could make him sleep?"

The ancient governess pursed up her lips with smiling malice; the Rocklitz, she believed, was doomed, through her own folly;

never could she play off two such men one against the other; the game was foolhardy and the House of Neitschütz would topple terribly; yet she, Françoise de Rosny, might be over the frontier before that happened, and well rewarded by this lovesick fool; Dresden was, anyhow, becoming dangerous.

"Bah!" she cried, licking her lips, then again, "Bah!" and flicked her hands together as if to brush dust off them. "A sleeping draught—a love potion—and something if both fail? I usually sell them together."

"What is the fee?—I have little with me now."

"Then you will return and get it. I must have at least an earnest."

The Rocklitz put her hand in her pocket and pulled out the golden egg, which she had observed lying carelessly on her table and brought with her, idly.

The ancient governess turned over the costly toy and marvelled at the madness that parted with so fatal a piece of evidence.

"I must have that back," panted the Rocklitz, "keep it as a pledge; I can send you money, or diamonds, in the morning."

"I wonder how long," smiled the other to herself, "you'll handle either."

"I entreat you give me the—give it to me. I am desperate. I have much to arrange. I must not pause to consider. It cannot harm him? It is all a delusion, perhaps—yet I have been assured—"

Madame de Rosny did not reply to any of this.

She said in level, practical tones:

"Will you take it with you now, or shall I send it to the Residenzschloss, or to your house?"

"Give it to me now," said the Rocklitz.

The other woman carefully put her work away in a little tulip-wood stand and left the room by the discreet door behind the painted screen; when this opened Madelon could hear voices, and see ragged gleams of a stronger light.

"There is nothing in what I do," she endeavoured to persuade herself. "I am too timid and nice. Perhaps, also, I shall not

need it—how do I know how near to surrender he may have been?"

She made a brave effort to put away from her the sordid horror of her errand, of her surroundings, not to name to herself what this house was, not to realize what she had come for—to keep far from her mind the truth about Françoise de Rosny and herself; to create, even in the urgency of this dreadful moment, the opiate of a dream.

The dark, neat, greenish parlour was very silent when the heavy door was shut on the unsteady voices and rude laughter, all precise and decorous save for the leering faces of the nude figures on the screen; these, despite her will, held Madelon's staring attention; they appeared to gather force and power and to be about to walk out of their wreath of fleshly flowers and to perform lewd antics on the floor; the air was oppressive, overheated, the light at once harsh and dim.

"Make haste, oh, make haste!" sobbed Madelon.

As if she obeyed a summons, the ancient governess appeared from behind the screen, closing the door on a wavering song which rose above a hum of talk, and, advancing with her still voluptuous movements, placed a small leathern box in Madelon's shaking hand.

When, immediately after this, the Rocklitz left the door in the blank façade of the discreet quiet mansion, she glanced apprehensively up and down the lonely street where the snow was now beginning to lay in low drifts and saw no one, save two shivering loungers in a doorway opposite, who were beguiling their wretchedness by tossing dice in and out of a ragged cap.

Madame Rocklitz never failed to be moved by any spectacle of human misery. She put her hand in her pocket and tossed a piece of money across the road before she hastened away to her own house, where she let herself in cautiously and secretly, then changed her disguise, hurriedly made a toilet, summoned her sedan chair and was carried to the Residenzschloss through the increasing greyness of the cold evening.

The instant that she left the narrow street, so dimly lit by the

one oil lamp at the corner, the two loungers to whom she had flung the piece of money rose and walking now alertly and rapidly, with no appearance of misery or starvation, made their way to the Residenzschloss and thence to the cabinet of Count Stürm to which they were conducted on showing a pass and put before him an exact and lucid account of how the Rocklitz had spent her afternoon.

The old minister grinned and caressed his monkey, calling it "Kind Pug" and "Pleasant Pug"; he shivered closer over the fire in his invalidish fashion and thought that, after all, with a woman one did not have to wait so long before she undid herself by open folly—eh, the Rocklitz, so clever, so fine—so lost!

He dismissed his agents with approbation of their cleverness and drank his drops with his coffee, then slowly made his way to the apartments of the Elector, who had been closeted that afternoon with the envoys from England, the Netherlands and the Empire, most unwillingly and sullenly going into the terms, which he cared little about, of the treaty with the Allies.

When Johann Georg left these distasteful labours he found his minister waiting for him, and decided, though reluctantly, to grant the old man an audience because it would be his last. Johann Georg had not seen Madame Rocklitz since the parade that morning and was longing to unbosom to her all the vexatious troubles of the day—the tiresome diplomats, their dull arguments, the disputes about the troops and where they were to serve, their equipment and pay; he regretted, therefore, bitterly, this further delay and was dry and hardly civil to Count Stürm, and asked him, impatiently, to get through with his affairs—"For I have had enough of business for today."

EIGHTEEN

Ferdinand Sturm knew that he had addressed himself to a difficult task. His credit with the Elector was almost entirely gone. Since the reign of the House of Neitschütz he had only been supported in his place by the French influence and by the strength of his own hold on the policies of the Electorate; the Elector had been too indolent and, in a manner, too timid to entirely break with him; but now the treaty with the Allies was signed and Stürm had seen a hostile look from Marshal von Neitschütz, and believed that he might be swept away entirely from the councils of Saxony, once the Elector took the field against France de Rébénec would leave Dresden and Stürm be without his most useful supporter and friend. The Electress and such champions as she had among the clergy seemed to have given up the unequal struggle with the Rocklitz which had been from the first so difficult.

Count Stürm therefore as he faced his sullen young master knew that this was about the last cast he would be able to try with fortune, that if he did not now succeed he would fail absolutely. He was aware also that he must be most careful. He had only retained his place by never breathing a word of suspicion or dislike or mistrust against the Rocklitz, by never commenting even on the outrageous conduct of Casimir, or protesting against the arbitrary overbearing and corrupt measures of the new Chief of the Army; he had endured everything, and with a smile, and his reward had been that he had been allowed to keep his place; but Stürm knew that there comes a moment when even a wary man must be reckless or lose everything in default.

Stroking his chin and looking on the ground quietly, and

even with a note of meekness, he asked the young Elector, who was impatiently awaiting his speech, if he knew where Marshal de Haverbeck had spent that afternoon.

"What matter is that to me?" asked Johann Georg, lounging in his great chair and glaring at the minister.

Stürm replied:

"I do not say as much as I know, for I am aware that your Highness is in the hands of my enemies, that my fall is, as I suppose, arranged."

Johann Georg flushed; he thought it was odd that Count Stürm should anticipate his overthrow; it had indeed been resolved upon by the Countess Rocklitz, who had this last day or two spoken several times on the matter; but the Elector had put it uneasily aside, as he did not care for the final dismissal of his father's minister—a useful, quiet man, after all, and old in the service of the House of Wettin.

"And what I say," added Stürm, "will possibly be set down to malice."

He added, with a smile:

"But since I am already ruined, perhaps your Highness will believe in my loyalty."

"I have not said you were ruined, Count Stürm," replied the young Elector, troubled and looking down; "let that go."

The minister was still smiling, peering between the frizzled curls of his monstrous wig with his bright eyes set in wrinkles.

"Marshal de Haverbeck went this afternoon into one of the suburbs of Dresden on the Bächnitz road, and visited a certain house there; he then went to a small church, the Marienkirche, where there is a tomb put up at his direction to one Carlotta Drexel, once his mistress, and then to an inn, where he drank a glass of wine, and so back to Dresden. In the church he met a young man, who appeared no more than a boy, and they walked together by the river, although it was snowing and the wind blowing cold. They had some manner of interview in the back parlour of the inn, and the young man followed Haverbeck back to Dresden—some ten minutes or so after he had left the

inn. He had been met by a groom with two horses, and when they reached the centre of the city, somewhere I think, by the Koenigsberg, the groom took the two horses and went his way, and the young man proceeded on foot to a certain house which has not the best of reputations."

"What is all this rigmarole to me?"

"Your Highness," replied Stürm, with a certain sternness, and fixing his tired, sunken eyes directly on the young man's flushed face, "will have the penetration, I believe, to discover that this house, and there is no worse in Dresden, is kept by Fani von Ilten and Madame de Rosny, the ancient governess of Madame Rocklitz."

At the mention of these two ill-omened names, connected with that of his beloved, the young Prince's candid face purpled, and a hundred hideous memories rose before his confused and disturbed mind; he moved uneasily and fingered the stiff bow of blue velvet under his chin.

"I hope," added Stürm, suavely, "that I do not vex your Highness by the mention of these ladies. They are still in some favour with Madame Rocklitz, for, as you must be aware, she sometimes visits them—"

"You think to put me in an entanglement?" cried the Elector, angrily; "I do not know what you would be at; I am a plain man and cannot follow these involved insinuations."

Stürm continued coolly, by no means affected by the young Elector's passionate interruption, and following out a preconceived plan he had made in his mind before he sought this interview.

"At the house I spoke of, a small country mansion, that Marshal de Haverbeck visited today, lives a young child, being brought up by some decent gentlefolk. This house is also often visited by Madame Rocklitz."

"Well, God's thunder," cried the scowling Elector, "she is free in her comings and goings; she has her friends and her acquaintances—why do you try to make evil out of so simple an affair?"

"I make nothing, I merely state the facts which I, being as I say a ruined man already, may venture to bring to your Highness's observation. I say Madame Rocklitz visits this Rosny, and it is a dangerous thing to do. For that woman lies, and seriously lies, under the imputation of witchcraft. . . . Her name has been put before the Commission that your Highness appointed—as a suspect."

"I never heard as much," exclaimed the young Elector, uneasily.

"There are many things take place in Dresden that your Highness does not hear of," replied the minister. "I hold in my hand a great deal of information about Madame de Rosny and her partner, Fani von Ilten. It is well known that they deal in potions and filthy brews, and even, on occasions, poison; they are adepts in the handling of drugs, and they sell potions, incantations and charms to the ignorant and the besotted."

"If that be so," answered the Elector, sullenly, yet with an increasing disorder in his looks, "it is work for the police."

"Yet your Highness would scarcely care to see Madame de Rosny, the ancient governess of the Countess Rocklitz, arrested on a charge of witchcraft, put to the question?"

"Then why," demanded the Elector, "do you bring the matter to me?"

"That you might use your good influence over the Countess, not to go near that house again. She is not, your Highness, if you will permit a warning, popular, and there is that scandal with the Church, and once there was such a handle as this—why," and he laughed, quietly, "I have already heard it said by the chitcats that she bewitches your Highness."

"You do indeed speak in malice," replied the young Elector, heavily; "and to no purpose. Madame Rocklitz was right when she said she had an enemy in you."

"Ah, she did say that, did she?" remarked Stürm, quickly. "Well, like Herr Knock, I have my resignation in my pocket before I dare to speak my mind; as, no doubt, you will find a pastor to absolve the Countess, so will you find a minister to

replace me. The favourites of princes seldom lack their instruments."

He rose as if to take a ceremonious departure, but the heated, vexed Elector cried out:

"What is it that you told me of that house in the suburbs, and the child brought up by some gentlewomen? What was that to me? Why did you mention it?"

Ferdinand Stürm stood silent, as if casting about how to make an odious revelation with the least possible offence.

Finally, he remarked:

"Marshal de Haverbeck pays for the maintenance of that child."

The young Elector laughed, as if relieved.

"Why, then, 'tis his and an end of the matter, and why do you plague me with it?"

Count Stürm asked smoothly:

"Is Madame Rocklitz wise in visiting Marshal de Haverbeck's child?"

The Elector rose heavily, and thundered:

"How do you know she does? Do you dare to have her watched? On my honour you go too far—do you think I'll endure this damned insolence?"

"Sir," replied Stürm, drawing up erectly his old, slight, invalidish figure, "I served your father for very many years and not with any ill repute. It might be allowed that I have always at heart the interests of Saxony. I would not now stay in office even if I could; I have served a man and a soldier, and I would not serve your Highness—a besotted boy—lost in a passion for a woman like the Rocklitz! And this I will say, even at the price of a lodging tonight in the Koenigsberg, this I will add, sir: I have some affection for your line, some regard for the dignity of the House of Wettin—you, you watch Madame Rocklitz—"

The young Elector could not hold his own against the scorn, the quiet authority of one so much older and more experienced than himself, of one who, since his childhood, he had seen in a position of power, directing his own father and the destinies

of his country. He faltered and turned away, troubled, uneasy, angry, but unable to answer, and struck with a certain remorse and regret and confusion—the word "besotted" stung his ear; he felt like a youth reproved disdainfully by a man for some crude foolishness.

"And watch Marshal de Haverbeck," added the minister, coolly, satisfied at the effect of his words.

"But he," cried the Prince, sharply, "leaves Dresden tomorrow."

"Ay, tomorrow," smiled the minister, "but there is always tonight—I do entreat you have them watched."

"Go," cried the Elector, hoarsely. "I forgive this spite and malice from a fallen man—take yourself to your estates, Count Stürm—you harm no one but yourself by this."

Stürm bowed.

"I have warned you, at the cost no doubt of what remains to me of liberty. But your Highness may come to consider that what I said was said with goodwill."

He was gone, with the quiet careful step of a sick man, and a little cough behind a steady hand, the tapping of his cane on the floor, and the falling of the green and indigo-coloured tapestry into place behind the door.

The Elector gazed at the spot where he had stood, and turned over in his mind that pattern of words, which had been surely carefully selected with some bitter and intense meaning, but the sense of which he could not rightly discover. But, out of it all, came one passionate fact—he loathed Marshal de Haverbeck, and Marshal de Haverbeck had been concerned in Stürm's story with the Countess Rocklitz—with Madelon. He had a child being brought up quietly in a suburb of Dresden, and Madelon went sometimes to see the child—if that wasn't one of old Stürm's lies. And this afternoon he had met a young man in a church—and who was the young man? They had drunk together in a parlour—where was the meaning in that? The young man had ridden back alone to Dresden, left his horse, and gone on foot to the establishment of Madame de Rosny! Johann Georg could see nothing in all that; his mind

returned to the point of the child. He then dismissed that also, and came back to the warning that Count Stürm uttered—"Have Haverbeck watched. . . ." "Why, it's only a few hours before the Envoy leaves Dresden—and why not have him watched?" Without telling Madelon or Count Stürm or anyone of his intention? He reflected how he should set about this, conscious for the first time, and conscious with a sense of shame and vexation, how he was hampered and hemmed in by the House of Neitschütz—the old man and the younger brother held the army between them, the elder was his chamberlain, and it was difficult to do anything without their knowledge as this must be done. They were always about the Residenzschloss, and, as Johann Georg felt now for the first time, watching him.

That was intolerable, for he was a prince and must exert himself to govern. The Neitschütz', no doubt detested Haverbeck as much as he did himself; but he did not wish to let them into this affair, he could not allow Spanheim, nor Sir William Colt, nor the Dutch Envoy to know that he had suspicions of their fellow-ambassador. Then he became impatient at his own vexation and hesitation, and impetuously sent for one of his gentlemen in waiting, and asked him who was on guard in the Residenzschloss that night, and he was told the Life Guards under a certain Captain Falaiseau, a Huguenot refugee whom the Elector knew and, in a way, liked and trusted. So, impulsively, he wrote and sealed with his own hand a letter to Captain Falaiseau, and told him to send two of his men to keep a watch on Marshal de Haverbeck until he left Dresden, and, as a disguise for this, he put as an excuse—"I believe the French may have a design on him out of disappointment at the signing of the Treaty, and I desire to protect his person."

Captain Falaiseau received this letter with the utmost amazement. Espionage, or even secret protection, he thought, was no work for a soldier, and he was at a loss as to whom to appoint to such a duty. It seemed to him an extraordinary matter for the Elector to be writing on with his own hand, and Marshal

de Haverbeck being a person of such great importance and the direct representative of the Empire, he hesitated to interfere in the matter, even at the direct command of his master, so, being in the interest and friendship of Stürm, and knowing nothing of the overthrow and ruin of that minister, Captain Falaiseau went straight to Stürm's apartments, where he was putting his papers in order, burning some in the stoves and sealing up others, and showed him the letter from the Elector.

"You may leave that affair to me," said the minister, with no sign of surprise or emotion; "I will have Marshal de Haverbeck watched. The Elector is, as you know, impulsive," and he smiled; "very youthful, too, you know, my dear Falaiseau; you did more than well in bringing this epistle to me."

Then he added, thoughtfully:

"I may require your services tonight—it is just possible that the Marshal might get into some danger—who knows? I believe the French are really very active in this affair."

"But you do not think they would attempt mischief in the streets of Dresden?" demanded the soldier, who did not wish to think too evil of his fellow-countrymen, grim Protestant as he was.

"They are more than disappointed and outraged at the signing of the Treaty," smiled the minister; "and it is always possible—who knows? Rébénec is a desperate man who must go back with failure in his mouth, and King Louis is not very generous to failures. Well, this doesn't touch your affair, my dear Falaiseau—you must take the soldier's part. Just be ready in the guard-room tonight with a file of men in case they are needed—I take all responsibility, of course."

"I understand none of it," said Falaiseau, bluntly, "and I hope I have not betrayed any particular plan of the Elector in coming to you."

He spoke a little uneasily, though he believed Stürm to be in the Elector's confidence in all such matters, and to be too sunk under the dominion of the Countess Rocklitz to have any sense or say of his own in politics. Captain Falaiseau, in common

with all who were not their direct followers or paid flatterers, loathed the House of Neitschütz, even though he retained his post through the kindness of the favourite, therefore he had come to Stürm in this affair. The minister had intended to have Marshal de Haverbeck watched on his own account, and it was very convenient to him that now this might be done in the name of the Elector.

The soldier dismissed, Stürm gave personally his instructions to the two accomplished spies who had brought him so accurate an account of the movements of Madame Rocklitz that afternoon, and then ceased his arrangements for leaving his comfortable familiar cabinet—his for twenty years—in the Residenzschloss; he even put back his books and papers in their old places, and composed himself to rest on the little bed he kept there for use on the occasions when he worked too late to return to his house. He gave his body-servant directions to leave him for the night, and told his sly, quiet, efficient secretary to wake him on the first report coming in from the agents. He was always a cautious man and disliked setting his expectations and hopes too high; so he said to himself before he went to sleep:

"It is very likely there is nothing in it, after all; I won't suppose that there is. Perhaps they came to no understanding whatever this afternoon, and anyhow she would find it very difficult to contrive, even with the help of what she got from Madame de Rosny—if she did get anything—it's all supposition, of course, and Haverbeck is no fool and must know what he risks."

But, as Stürm hung up his periwig on the stand and drew his nightcap over his ears, he repeated to himself:

"Still, there's always a chance."

When Johann Georg had sent his orders to Captain Falaiseau he felt a weight gone from his heart and mind, as if he had, in some unexplainable manner, protected himself and outwitted them all, and then he turned with the greatest joy and relief to the thought of Madelon—these had been two tiresome, vexatious days, closeted with those ministers, going over the

pact and the protocols and the terms and the money; he hated all the formality and the ceremonies, the banquet and the parade; he had not been alone with her for hours. Twice during the afternoon he had sent messages begging her to be in her apartments that night, for, lately, she had taken to living much in her own house, in the Neustadt, and he knew that now she was not in attendance on the Electress and might, if she chose, evade him and retire to her own mansion, but when he reached her apartments she was there and had dismissed her women.

Johann Georg had come impetuously and hurriedly through the corridors, had flung open her door violently, and was on the threshold of her room, when he saw her there, sitting calmly, and evidently awaiting him; he paused, nervously, uneasily and troubled; he wished that Stürm had not mentioned witchcraft and wished that he did not have to think of that now.

Why had those bigots dared to refuse her absolution and make her an outcast from the Church? Everyone knew the miserable character of the pastor who had finally absolved her. Witchcraft! diabolical art, in league with devils and imps and fiends! Why, he'd sweep his dominions clear of that, the Rosny should be put over the frontier and the other woman lodged in the Koenigsberg.

He put his hand over his forehead, trying to brush aside these fancies, but tired, bewildered and exasperated.

The Rocklitz smiled at him.

"Well, you see I am here, you wished to speak to me—something about these matters with England and the Allies, is it not? But, presently you must let me go home, for I am tired after the fatigue of these two days; I believe I may have been chilled on the parade ground this morning, for I shiver continuously."

"You would leave the Residenzschloss tonight?" he demanded, angrily. "Why, if you are ill, it is the more foolish, for it's snowing fast and is bitter cold—a hideous spring indeed. No, Madelon, you must not leave me tonight."

"Indeed, but I must," she protested, with some haughtiness. "My father is coming to see me—I have to speak to him."

"But as late as this?" objected the Elector. "He can see you tomorrow—tonight I want you, Madelon; tonight you must stay with me—"

"I have always entreated you," she replied, unsteadily, "not to circumscribe my liberties, not to restrain me against my will—for that would make our position intolerable for both of us, sir—and a slave of me."

Johann Georg looked at her—hurt, bewildered, yet with complete adoration.

She, indeed, seemed tired; her eyes were shadowed, he might almost have believed that she had been weeping; yet he had never known Madelon to weep. She wore a plain cloth dress buttoned up to the chin, and a hood and mantle lined with fur lay ready to her hand over the back of a chair. She really intended, then, leaving him tonight; a desolate sense of loneliness swept over his spirit, and he resolved that whatever happened it should not be so; he did not in any way connect her desire to return to her own house with the story that Stürm had told him. In her presence his suspicions always died.

The silence was unhappy. Johann Georg came and stood by the mantelpiece and gazed down into the fire, after pushing the logs with his boot, so that they broke apart and flared into sparks. With his flushed face and his blunt features, his hot blue eyes and dark yellow hair, his rich, heavy clothes, he looked a splendid young animal, at once excited and wretched, confused and tender.

"Well," asked Madame Rocklitz, softly regarding him, "everything is done, is it not? The papers are signed; the troops will be in the field and you will be a soldier, indeed, sir. Is not all concluded and signed?" she insisted. "And what did you want to ask me?"

"Nothing," he replied, with wistful sullenness; "you are so much cleverer than I, Madelon, you will understand it all. I

am ignorant of a great deal, when they talk of business I want to get away into the open air."

"We are committed to them now, and why not? I never loved the French," she remarked, absently.

"Haverbeck"—and he blundered stupidly over the name—"will leave tomorrow with all his papers signed, eh?"

"Yes, he'll leave tomorrow," said Madelon, steadily.

"It was a short visit," remarked the Elector, doubtfully. "But I did as you advised—I gave him his banquet and his review."

"And he was impressed, was he not?" she smiled.

"I don't know—he said nothing but formal compliments, he is amiable to all."

"He knew we had a fine army, that you were a great prince?"

"A great prince!" cried Johann Georg, throwing up his head, "sometimes I think you laugh at me, Madelon."

And he peered at her, dropping those fair lashes like gold dust over the bright blue eyes, fearing to detect a half ironical look of flattery on her face.

"Sometimes I think I am very stupid, Madelon, and that half the time you smile at me."

But he uttered this vague reproach with the utmost abandonment of tenderness, and came to her chair and knelt beside it, and placed his tired head on her knees.

Madelon stroked his thick, coarse, yellow hair and sighed under her breath while he brought out his troubles—as he always did bring out his troubles to Madelon—all his doubts and vexations and the matters he did not understand, but which were always clear to her.

"Have you heard them say that Madame de Rosny deals in witchcraft?" he asked, drowsy from the warmth, the relief after the day's strain, and happy at her kindness.

The delicate hand stroking his head was still.

"I try to hear nothing of Madame de Rosny," replied Madelon. "Why do you speak of her? Do we not try to keep all vile, foul and ugly things away from us?—and she is all those, as I believe."

"I was always afraid of her when I was a child," said Johann Georg. "She used to frown and pinch me. I have heard this witchcraft charge against her tonight; I think she should be put across the frontier with no scandal, for," he added, bitterly, "she knows too much of our old days in Arnsdorf."

"What does she know?" smiled Madelon. "She would tell lies in any place; there was no shame in Arnsdorf that we should be afraid to have it spoken of. I believe Madame de Rosny would leave the country if we wish. But she must not be harmed. And there is no such thing as witchcraft."

Johann Georg felt a profound sweet languor as he rested his head on Madelon's knee.

"You are like an enchantment," he murmured, and then caught himself up on the word; enchantment and witchcraft—the same—a spell, an incantation!

He could think of nothing else but Madelon, and every moment spent away from her was full of an appalling tedium; sharply and with an ugly clarity he recalled that first night in Arnsdorf and the little glass from her toilet wares in which she had given him a drink poured from the greenish bottle taken from her dressing table.

Johann Georg lifted up his heavy head, rich with the tumbled yellow hair, and looked at her in a peculiar manner. He was dazed and enthralled with some witchery of the senses from the touch of those lovely hands on his brow and hair, from gazing into those wide-set pale gold eyes; she filled him with a profounder emotion than he had ever known, with her kind beauty and lovely life—beauty and life joined in one radiance . . . she drew him away from everything he did not understand, from everything that confused and vexed and humiliated him.

He put his hands round her waist and drew her closer to him.

"You won't leave me tonight, Madelon; it's snowing, and cold —why should you wish to leave me tonight? Indeed, I won't let you go. I have been without you too long."

He pressed her closer still, drawing her down from the chair.

"You do not love me."

He did not mean to say that, but the words had come. Then he began to plead with her.

"Haven't I pleased you? You wanted me to be a soldier—well, I shall be. Not, perhaps," he added, with a sudden fling of boyish jealousy, "a great soldier like Marshal de Haverbeck, though I might be, who knows? But I've got the army for you and I'll get you a victory, too; when I've joined the Allies and beaten the French. And, oh, Madelon, what more do you want? —what can I do for you? Would you like the key of the green vaults again?—will you have more of the treasure? I'll give you everything—the Collar of the Golden Fleece, the Garter to hang over your bosom—blue favours you."

He could scarcely have said anything that more hurt and vexed her, for this was treating her like a trifle—a creature to be coaxed into a good humour for his pleasure; it was not the first time he had offered her extravagant bribes and clumsy caresses to win her against her will only in the end to force her to his wish by the exercise of a strength that could be brutal enough.

She could with difficulty refrain from saying:

"If you do not want me to hate you, let me go tonight."

She tried to smile, but her lips quivered as she said:

"Tomorrow—we might go to Moritzburg—tonight I have a wish, a fancy, a longing to be alone."

"And I the same to keep you."

Madelon considered the flushed, passionate young face; she thought, in horror: "Soon he'll remind me that he has bought and paid for me—"

"Why do you gaze at me like that, Madelon? You're estranged from me—what is it?"

"No—no—"

"Why do you want to get away, then? You shall not."

The veins swelled on his forehead and the blood rushed into his blue eyes.

"I'll begin to think that what Stürm said—"

"Ah, he has spoken of me?"

"Never mind. But you shall stay. I'm not a boy, Madelon, you treat me like a boy—I'm to be obeyed."

Madelon soothed him, she made no further allusion to her departure; she kissed his forehead and then his lips, and then drew herself gently away, and began unbuttoning the neat dress which reached her chin.

"Well, if you will, I'll stay; I've always stayed if you have wished it. Indeed, I am not very well tonight. And why did you talk to me of witchcraft—with Madame de Rosny's name? That's hideous, you know; have I not always stood between the law and such miserable wretches as have been detained for witchcraft?"

"Yes," frowned the Elector, still kneeling at her empty chair, "I remember that."

She moved towards the cabinet and as she did so she passed the window, and, lifting the heavy curtains, looked out into the night.

"It's certainly snowing very fast," she said; "perhaps I was foolish to think of returning home tonight. But I must send my father some message. Yet again, perhaps he will not come either, in this storm."

Johann Georg took no heed of what she said; he was watching that exquisite figure and lovely head and radiant face, the fine small fingers unbuttoning the neat grey dress.

She passed into the cabinet and came out again, and he was startled, and by a formless dread, to see that she held a small green glass in her hand and the shape was like the goblet into which she had poured the drink she had given him on the last night at Arnsdorf.

"I'll drink no more today," he said, sombrely and sullenly, rising to his great height.

But she persuaded him.

"It is a cordial and I have been taking it myself, feeling the wintry spring had chilled me. Look up, sir," she added, smiling, "and lift your heart. The winter is over and the spring here,

and we will go to Moritzburg, and you shall hunt in the green allées again—it is April, even if it snows—come, if I stay, you must be good company."

Johann Georg smiled and drank, caring for nothing save that she was kind again, staying with him, and he would have her all the night, she would not leave him, but lay close to his heart, close in his arms, with her beauty and her radiance and her dreams into which she drew him, involving his soul and his senses in a myriad delights; the saffron locks would be over his heart, the world would be shut away and he and she would be transported to realms filled with unutterable joys.

He sat down suddenly and complained of giddiness; the little glass he held slipped from his hand and a few drops of the cordial fell on his laces.

"The room is too hot—I'll open the window," murmured Madelon, watching him; he seemed hardly able to hold his head up; she went up to him, pulled a handkerchief out of her bosom; as he swayed with closed eyes, she held this to his nostrils, as Madame de Rosny had directed; in a few seconds he was heavily asleep.

The Countess Rocklitz watched him for a moment or two, then pulled the cushions easily into place under his head, buttoned up her gown again, put on her hood and mantle, and carefully left the Residenzschloss by the secret passage which had been arranged for her and his special convenience.

It was snowing heavily, but a plain chair was in waiting, and the lady stepped within at once and was carried to her own house in the Neustadt.

NINETEEN

That night, about the same hour as that when Ferdinand Stürm was settling himself to repose in the improvised bed in his cabinet, a messenger called at the lodgings of Marshal de Haverbeck with an imperative message from the Elector, demanding his instant presence at the Residenzschloss. The hour and the summons seemed alike strange to Marshal de Haverbeck. He summoned the messenger into his presence and sharply interrogated him. The man, who was in the Saxon livery, bore no written message, but said he had been despatched on the instant by the Elector himself who was closeted with Sir William Colt and Count Spanheim over the papers which had been signed that morning, and desired the immediate attendance of Marshal de Haverbeck. The Imperial envoy reflected: the summons was curious but not altogether grotesque. It was known that he was leaving Dresden early in the morning, and it might be that his presence was wanted tonight on some nice point that could not be decided without him; although he knew that he had signed the necessary pact and set to it the Emperor's seal, it might be that some detail had arisen which the Elector, headstrong and obstinate as he was, disputed.

Marshal de Haverbeck was in no mood for idleness or sleep, he had intended to pass the hours of the later evening with some friends in a neighbouring mansion—one time his companions in the Saxon army. His duties and his distresses, as he believed, in Dresden were over, and he had but to put the hours through before he left in the morning for his estates. It was, therefore, no interruption to any design of his to obey this summons and, after further reflection and a closer questioning of the man, he decided to accompany him to the Residenzschloss, for the fellow told him that the Elector had sent a light coach that was waiting

below, and when Marshal de Haverbeck stepped out into the snowy night—this cold, strange April night—there was the elegant coach waiting in the dark street—a simple affair with but two horses, yet with the arms of Saxony clearly on the side. It occurred to Haverbeck as he entered this carriage that possibly —though it seemed most unlikely—the Elector might have heard of his meeting with Madame Rocklitz that afternoon, and his handsome face grew thoughtful, and he wondered how he should gloss over and put a good show on her most recklessly imprudent act; yet he was not very fearful on this point for he believed it almost impossible that Johann Georg should have come to a knowledge of the meeting that afternoon in the little church in the suburbs, and he failed altogether to consider Stürm as a factor in these affairs.

The snow was falling thick and the night was cold, so Marshal de Haverbeck drew up the window leathers as the vehicle proceeded through the streets, the wheels making little sound for the snow was already deep with slush and mud—a late storm which had come heavily, belying the fair and sudden promise of spring —such snow and such cold were uncommon in April. Haverbeck thought of his estates, his fruit trees and his vines, and was sorry that they would be blighted and frostbitten. When the coach stopped he alighted and looked round, still with this thought in his mind, and noticed that the snow was falling more lightly and that which lay in the road melting, so that he had some hope of a fairer morrow and the return of the spring. It seemed to him that he knew an unusual longing for the serene light days, the sun, and the sight of fresh leaves under a clear sky.

It was very dark and he could only just see in that dim yellowish circle cast by the coach-lights that the servant who had accompanied him, seated beside the coachman, had alighted and very respectfully held out a small horn lantern and indicated a door.

"Is this the Residenzschloss?" asked Marshal de Haverbeck.

"Yes, your Excellency, it is a private door into the Residenz-

schloss, and the Elector particularly wished that you should enter this way and come straight to his cabinet."

Haverbeck saw only a straight door and a blank wall, neither was familiar to him, but he did not know all the entrances to the Residenzschloss, and had no occasion to suspect that the fellow was lying. The door was opened instantly at his approach and he found himself in a short corridor with tapestries showing the loves of Zeus. The door closed behind him and he heard the coach driving away. The servant, who had followed him, took his hat and cloak and, with great deference, asked him to walk upstairs. These stairs were very light and pretty with a gilt rail and panelled at the sides with pale garlands of myrtle, roses and poppies. Haverbeck, halfway up, stopped short and looked round.

"This is not the Residenzschloss," he said, aloud.

The servant had disappeared. A young footboy in a silver livery came running down the stairs.

"Is the Elector here?" demanded Haverbeck. "Is Saxony here?"

The boy, who seemed frightened, bowed and implored him to come up a little further.

"In this first chamber, Herr Marshal."

Haverbeck followed. The boy opened the door and Haverbeck entered, not without some doubt and suspicion.

The room was unexpectedly large and lofty and filled with an odd dim illumination which came from a high-hung silver lamp, where the lights were concealed and only the glow diffused quietly over the large space of the lofty chamber. Directly under this lamp was standing Madame Rocklitz in a grey gown buttoned up to the chin, with a riding hood and cloak still hanging about her shoulders, and touched with the fast-melting flakes of snow; despite her youth there was something spectral about her appearance.

Haverbeck was most angry with himself and the foolish ease with which he had fallen into her reckless and shameless device.

"This is your house?" he demanded, sternly.

"Yes," said Madame Rocklitz, "yes."

"You have made a fool of me," he retorted. "I forgot that you could use the Elector's livery and his carriages."

Madame Rocklitz paid no attention to these reproaches which she must have expected.

"Do you think that I could have let this afternoon be the last time—in that dark and cold, standing above the dead? Tomorrow you go away and we may never meet again!"

"And I so hoped," he answered, exasperated. "Whether we meet again or no I shall not be altered in my mind nor disturbed in my heart. Have you considered your present peril? If this caprice of yours were discovered it might bring you very low indeed."

"I am very low already," she replied, walking about a little, "very low, as I suppose."

Haverbeck folded his arms and leant against the wall just inside the door. His dark handsome face expressed a mounting anger and startled disgust. He tapped his foot, bit his lip and frowned. He wondered what cursed devil had been dogging him that day, that twice he should be delivered into such an intolerable situation.

"I can't reason with you," murmured Madame Rocklitz, still walking up and down under the soft dim light of the silver lamp; "I can't say all I thought of saying, but I'm so young—it can't be too late. You asked for me, you know—three times you asked for me. How was I to know what I was doing—how was I to know what I should feel like when you went away? I bought your little house," she added, rapidly, "and sometimes I go away and sit there, and pretend that I am that girl, and that you are coming home to me."

Haverbeck did not speak, but kept his glance, his slant brows frowning, on the carpet.

"And I go sometimes to see the child," she continued, "he is like you."

"I'll move him," said Haverbeck, "I'll take him to Vienna. I

heard from his guardians that a woman came, and supposed that it was you."

"Could I harm him?" she exclaimed, overwhelmed by that. His tone was not kind as it had been that afternoon, but dry and hostile.

"I'll not risk it," he replied; "I want no tie between us."

Madame Rocklitz stared at him with darkened eyes that were uncertain and wild.

"I never thought that you were cruel and brutal," she said, in a faltering amaze. "I know what I have lost, I do not ask what you once offered. You will marry some other woman, of course, but I—I know what happens to women like me. . . . There's Madame de Rosny—it was she who made me wicked, even as a little child I was wicked. You see, I am talking quietly —I do not entreat, or weep, or complain. I tell you I know what I can expect, yet do not think too badly of me—they say very foul things in Dresden, and, I suppose, in all the Empire. Yet I have never had another lover, I have been like a wife to him. . . ."

"And what's that to me?" asked Haverbeck.

Madame Rocklitz was standing erect, beating one hand on the other:

"I am a woman, and I am unhappy, and I am asking you to pity me; the time is going very fast—we have so little chance, any of us, of happiness."

Haverbeck left the wall against which he had been leaning and walked towards her with a measured and thoughtful tread, holding himself carefully, with a controlled pain and stateliness; the light fell vaguely on his straight and handsome features, clouded by his inner distress.

"You want no pity or help from me," he said, in quiet tones; "you have got a prince and a princedom to dispose of, and I have not heard yet that you have hesitated to take advantage of that—this whim or fancy by which you seek to entrap me must be some wanton perversity; but let's be done with all this," he

added, with sad impatience, "which makes but fools of both of us—it was not well to trap me here."

Madame Rocklitz said: "I am afraid I am not so secure as you think; I have so many enemies and my brothers help them; I think sometimes he, too, begins to be suspicious and terrified. There's the other woman, you know—the Electress—and all the clergy, her friends, and the French party—"

"But," interrupted Haverbeck, "you have but to kiss him, embrace him, flatter him, and he is all yours again and Saxony with him—"

"You're jealous of him," she cried, wistfully, "you're jealous of that—"

"I'm sorry for him," said Haverbeck. "The boy had some good in him, some manliness, some enterprise—now he's violent, drunken and fuddled; he leaves his affairs in the hands of your father and your brothers and knows what is going on around him—corruption and disgrace, disorder and scandal. He's paid too dearly for you, to my thinking."

"You would once have paid more," she reminded him.

"Madame Rocklitz, it is useless to scan the past, but never would I have given for any woman what Saxony has given for you."

"Why did you come to Dresden?" she demanded.

"That is a question I have answered already, and you will not catch me with it a second time into any different interpretation."

"I would go with you," implored Madame Rocklitz, "if you asked me—I would leave it all for you."

"I do not ask you," said Haverbeck.

He reminded her quietly how late the night was growing and how recklessly imprudent was her lingering here.

"The Elector is known to be jealous and suspicious, and your enemy, Ferdinand Stürm, is still in the Residenzschloss."

She interrupted him, she would hear none of that; she continued her low, frantic pleading:

"Could you not forget for a few hours, just for one night?" she entreated, in a fallen voice. "It is not so long till the dawn--

could you not stay with me till then? Take me but as a toy, as an amusement; think of me vilely as you will—but do not go, Delphicus."

"As for that, I am in your power," he answered, drily. "It seems you hold me prisoner here. But, for the rest, you speak to a man whom you do not move, you do not even entice. In these matters I am nice, Madame Rocklitz, and take no woman straight from another's handling. Get back to your lover and make the best terms you can with him, for in no way can I serve your ends."

He spoke with, for him, uncommon harshness. That afternoon she had been an object worthy indeed of compassion, but this second trick seemed to him common and wanton; he thought she defiled the memory of their recent parting which had not been without tenderness and dignity; now she revealed, he thought, how she had been degraded by her position and he was degraded with her, their relationship further smirched, and he felt sickened and humiliated past endurance; his honour was stung, too, at the thought of the Elector; he believed that Johann Georg had every right to her complete fidelity for he had been very loyal to every pledge made to her, even at the price of his own shame and discomfiture; and she seemed already an adept at deceiving the ingenuous, confiding youth; how, Haverbeck wondered, had she contrived to keep away tonight from the Residenzschloss? She must be, for all his own reluctance to believe it, a light woman, heiress of the bad blood of the House of Neitschütz. . . .

Madelon, seeing his distracted and angered looks, cried softly:

"Why, I might threaten you, Delphicus. You forget that I have power, as much power as any man, and I might make you smart for your incivility."

"I did expect some womanish malice," he replied, sadly, "I do not doubt you are ill to do with—"

Haverbeck was contemplating her, as if his faculties, usually so quick and active, were clogged and compressed by emotion. She thought that, perhaps, at last he was stirred. His face was

flushed. In spite of his severity and sadness there was a grandeur and a fervour about him—an outline, a light, a strength and a passion—even if it were a strength and a passion of indignation, sorrow and wrath—that utterly commanded her. If he had caught hold of her to kill her she would not at that moment have resisted but been grateful for the punishment, she thought. He did not touch her but walked past her to the window, drawing aside the curtains and gazing out at the silent storm of snow that showed swift, dim, in the light of the street lamp.

Madame Rocklitz moved across the vaguely-lit room to a long low settee with Chinese figures on the satin cover by the fireplace, where a handful of ashes but faintly stirred with heat the chill of the large apartment. She was broken in spirits and bewildered in mind. She put her hands before her face not knowing what to do next. She dropped her hands and looked at him, standing looking out of the window with his back to her, like a man disheartened, distressed and passionately resisting an odious depression of the soul; she marked, greedily, every detail of his person. He certainly appeared older than last summer—she had noted that the other day; he was graver, too; not, she thought, so often gay. Where had he been going tonight when her bold ruse brought him here? He wore the Imperial uniform, but none of the formal decorations he had observed on the parade ground that morning—why, that morning—and it seemed æons ago; his sash of knitted silk, his baldric of gold-fringed embroidered leather, his sword with guard and quillions of cut steel, were all admirable though plain; Delphicus had always been expensive in his appointments even when he was poor; now, Madelon supposed, he had money enough. He moved a little with a sad impatience, and she could see his straight profile shaded by the full dark curls and the faint sparkle of a rose brilliant brooch in his cravat—all these details, very dear to her, Madelon noted in this moment of anguished fatigue; when all her schemes and contrivances seemed, in his presence, so futile and mean. She would never know what he was seeing, what he was thinking. She would let him go. He would love

some other woman as he had once loved her—some woman who would make him forget this; a horrid dryness contracted her throat; he might have been kind, even if he no longer loved her; she was beautiful, surely; she had not believed it would be so difficult to rouse him to at least a transitory gust of passion, for she had judged him by her lover, Johann Georg, thereby showing her great inexperience of men and the differences between them.

Madelon was rigid on the Chinese settee as he by the window—in her plain grey gown buttoned to the chin, with her colourless face and numbed air, she seemed a phantom of herself; she endeavoured to command herself—how useless that desperate, fantastic visit to Madame de Rosny—how had so dull and stupid a trick entered the compass of her inclinations? Yet her cold, trembling hand went to her pocket where there was the second little bottle from the leather case which Madame de Rosny had given her—one had been used in exchange for the golden egg and the dose within had proved efficacious. Perhaps, this . . . but it was the vilest of all vile expedients. She had the phial out and in the palm of her hand, but he would not drink, she could not entice him, he was not easy like Johann Georg; he was standing there now like a figure of granite, of bronze, of wood, of marble—like anything but a human being.

Swiftly and unexpectedly he turned and walked towards her where she crouched over the dying fire. Madelon's fingers closed over the phial; he appeared to have commanded himself and decided on his line of action.

"Madelon, I do earnestly beg of you to put an end to this, for we murder our souls in this contention."

"Do not withstand me so, show me some kindness."

"Madelon, there is much you must consider; think that the very power by which you hold me here you owe to the favour of another man. Recall he pays for this house, the carriage I came in, the servants you seduced to deceive me. . . ."

"All that is of no importance—how can you put my pain so low? *He* has had what he pays for."

"You use his indulgences to betray him—he must be very easy

for you to have so much liberty; he has put you before his Church, his wife, his subjects, his line—the man who secretly steals you from him must be gross indeed. To me you are pledged to him, deeply, and I find it amazing that you should not feel some loyalty to him—why, you are so much more shrewd and able than he that you should disdain to deceive one so much your inferior."

"None of that matters to me," said Madelon, dully. "I love you. Don't you see?" She shivered.

"Then, God help us, Madelon; if you loved me how could you sell yourself to him? And how, being in his possession all these months, fawning for his favours, can you still talk of love at all?"

"I do not know," she answered, with a ghastly smile, "I do not know."

"Allow me to go now—this so humiliates us both; yes, you and no one else have been able to humiliate me. Madelon—" He could hardly control his distress, his scorn of these degrading circumstances, his passionate need of escape from this dim-lit room.

Madelon opened her fingers and stared at the phial on her palm.

"I am asking you to stay, Delphicus, offering myself to you. I am lost and vile. As I suppose, I sold myself, as you say. And more than I knew. My soul as well as my body. I doubt not I'm damned, if there are any hells. I'm twenty-one, and think of the years ahead. They will have me, my enemies—I cannot always be so prudent. . . ."

"Hush, Madelon." He leant over the settee, careless of everything but her desperate need of comfort. "Johann Georg will protect you—'tis a prince and a generous one. We but con over the misery of this afternoon—you were always above womanish qualms and vapours—"

"I'll hush," she interrupted, "if you'll stay. Only till the dawn, and that is earlier now. He's safe—I've arranged it all. If you want to go the doors are open."

Leaning so near to her, he observed the little phial in her outstretched palm; she had forgotten it; all her arts, her hopes, were

exhausted. She turned to stare into the troubled face so close to her own, and asked:

"Delphicus, will you kiss me once?"

Instead of replying, he took the little bottle from her open palm and flung it into the fire. The glass shattered in the ashes and the thick liquid ran out and steamed into an acrid smoke.

"Poor child," he said, under his breath, "poor child! Yes, I'll kiss you, Madelon—farewell!"

Haverbeck bent and kissed her forehead, she sat immoveable, watching the drug that was to have enmeshed and chained his senses ascending into that foul smoke. Even when he kissed her she could not stir, for this was a different manner of caress from any that she had imagined in all her wild longings for his endearments; it was more final than any rebuke.

At the door, Haverbeck looked back at her, sitting slack and exhausted in the chair.

She appeared to be ill and to support herself with difficulty, and her loveliness was eclipsed by the slow fumes which rose from the ash-strewn hearth.

"This is the ugliest night that ever I have passed," sighed Haverbeck, in so low a tone that she did not hear it.

He left her and, without opposition, descended the light gay staircase, opened the door on the snowy street and was, as he thought, free.

When the agent had returned to the Residenzschloss and reported to Count Stürm, who sat up eagerly in his bed to hear the news, that Marshal de Haverbeck had been shadowed that night and seen to take one of the Elector's coaches and travel in it to Madame Rocklitz's house, the minister, hardly crediting such good fortune, instantly went to the apartments of the Elector and demanded in peremptory tones to see his master. The alarmed valet declared that Johann Georg was with Madame Rocklitz and must not be disturbed. Count Stürm, in nightcap and bedgown, was past all such considerations. He insisted, with his dry air of authority, on two of the Elector's gentlemen accompanying him to the apartments of the Rocklitz; her women

were aroused and summoned, but knew nothing and were terrified, swore and protested, and were dismissed harshly by the stern minister, after they had given up the keys of her private chambers.

In her anteroom, which Stürm entered immediately, they found the Elector, hunched in a chair, his head on a cushion, breathing heavily and purpling in the face.

Count Stürm bent over him eagerly.

"Drugged!" he exclaimed. He fingered Johann Georg's lace, on it there were a few drops of a dead purplish colour.

"Laudanum—he's been drenched with laudanum!"

He passionately ordered the two amazed and horrified gentlemen to endeavour to wake their master, but they could not do so, though they shook him and called him by name, and fetched cold water to dash in his face; he only groaned and turned about in his seat.

"She had him safe till morning," grinned Stürm.

Without losing any more time he sent a command, in the Elector's name, to Captain Falaiseau, commander of the guard this night. . . . Well, with a woman one did not have to wait long, after all!

When Marshal de Haverbeck left the house of Madame Rocklitz he paused for a moment, uncertain; for he had not been thinking in the least what his movements now would be, but had walked out of her presence and her mansion as if he did not know what was before him, giving no mind to any future action. The Elector's coach, which he had half expected to see, had gone; the snow had ceased to fall, and the moon had broken through the heavy banks of wintry clouds, and seemed to promise a more serene season in the space of bluish sky which its wan beams illuminated. Haverbeck, a distracted and troubled man, still hesitated: to return to his lodgings or go to his friends? He could bear no more tonight, he must seek oblivion, even if this were no more than sitting over cards and drinking with pleasant, easy company who knew nothing of his distresses; and tomorrow

he would be able to put all this behind him, go to his estates and take up a quiet, well-ordered life of common affairs.

When Haverbeck reached the corner of the short street, the only way by which he could leave the mansion which stood at the end of a square, he perceived, waiting there, what he at first thought was a hearse, for loose straggling clouds had passed over the moon; he soon discovered that the vehicle was a plain carriage, without arms, with one horse and an ungainly driver; as if escorting this gloomy coach a squad of soldiers waited in the shadow.

Haverbeck was passing them when the officer stepped up to him, respectfully barring his path:

"Marshal de Haverbeck, I have to ask you to accompany me."

Haverbeck paused, quickly calculating his chances of escape—the number of men opposed to him—these were already closing round him. . . .

"An arrest," he remarked, "and by what right?"

"Sir," said Captain Falaiseau, who had been very precisely trained in his part by Stürm, "I am sure that for the sake of the lady you have just left you will make no scandal."

Haverbeck stood silent; certainly, Madelon was ruined if he made a resistance that would cause a public tumult in the street; some gossip would blow the matter abroad; he was too well known in Dresden. . . .

"Is this by the Elector's orders?"

"Sir, it is not."

By hers, then, there was no one else; these men had been posted here, a trap; if he left her early he was to be arrested—if he had stayed till the dawn no doubt the way would have been clear enough—and she had instructed the soldiers to remind him (how needlessly!) that he could not raise a brawl without ruining her—poor Madelon, indeed, so sly and cunning.

"It seems I must go with you," he said, "but I hope you have, sir, well considered your responsibility, you will have to account for this."

He was amazed that Madelon's power should extend so far, that soldiers should be at the bidding of a woman's spite and passion.

Falaiseau asked for his sword; Haverbeck hesitated, this went hard with him; he believed that if he had wished he could have got away from all of them; he gave up the weapon and entered the sombre carriage.

He thought that he had left her insensible between life and death, scarcely knowing the things of this world from those of the next, or being able to distinguish reality from the shapes created by their mutual anguish, and yet she must have had this sharply enough in her mind; this was his reflection during that dark drive—pleasant company! Falaiseau sat opposite him and said nothing.

When the carriage stopped Haverbeck stepped out and beheld a huge black bulk before him, rising up sharply against the sky, where the moon now rode high and free, the phalanxes of clouds falling back behind a void of silver; more soldiers were waiting for him. They took him over a bridge and through a heavy gateway and there, in an inner courtyard where some porters came out with flambeaux to meet them, the prisoner paused and looked round him at the high enclosing walls:

"Where am I?" asked Haverbeck.

"In the Koenigsberg," replied Captain Falaiseau. He asked Haverbeck to come into a small guard-room in one of the tower gates and then requested him to turn out his pockets; Haverbeck complied drily—a rouleau of rix-dollars, some loose money, a watch and seals, a note-book and silver box—a Saracen dagger with a handle of jade set with balas rubies.

Falaiseau returned all these save the dagger; this had been picked up on the banks of the Tisza after the Turkish rout and Haverbeck valued it oddly.

"I am sure," said Falaiseau, civilly, "it will be returned immediately to your Excellency—with your sword and your liberty."

TWENTY

Ferdinand Sturm managed this perilous affair with the greatest discretion; he was at his best in a matter like this, so vital and so delicate, that required such cautious and exact handling. He was immediately alert, cool, eager; there was no manner of disorder in the Residenzschloss, no breath of scandal stirred in the busy corridors or crowded antechambers. Captain Falaiseau was a very prudent man—one who hoped much from the favour of Stürm. It was given out that Marshal de Haverbeck had gone to his estates in Saxony and would return to take leave of the Elector in a day or so. . . . When the Rocklitz did not appear in her place at the morning *levée* of the Electress it was whispered by someone somehow, delicately and carefully, that the lady was ill and had caught some manner of chill on the parade ground the day before.

Stürm was early by the bed of the Elector and watched him wake, with sighs and groans and strugglings from his long drugged sleep. When, at length, he returned to full consciousness, Stürm made some quiet apologies for his presence, saying that he had heard the Elector was ill, and had come early to make his enquiries, and then, hearing that he was not ill but merely sleeping heavily, had waited, because he had something to say to him, but neither the Prince nor the minister spoke of the scene of last night and the resignation which had been proffered and taken. Johann Georg was drowsy and confused. He appeared surprised to find himself in his own red canopied bed; as he stretched and yawned and moved he turned sick and could hardly hold up his heavy fair head.

"I wish your Highness's approbation for the arrest of the Baroness von Ilten and her partner. I had news last night that

they are very actively concerned in this matter of witchcraft, which, as your Highness feels, is a plague and a disgrace to Saxony."

He purposely had not mentioned the name of Françoise de Rosny, and no train of thought was roused in the Elector's still half-drugged mind.

"Arrest whom you will," groaned Johann Georg, "and a plague on all devils, and clear them out as fast as you may; but, in God's name, leave me in peace, for I feel confoundedly sick."

Stürm said: "There is nothing to disturb your Highness with today, all this business was done yesterday; and Marshal de Haverbeck has departed for his estates."

At this name the Prince remembered in a very confused fashion that he had had Haverbeck watched the night before, but supposed as no report had been sent him that nothing had come of that, and now it seemed grotesque to suppose that anything should come of it. Then his mind travelled heavily round to Madelon, and he wondered where she was, he wished her sent for; he could not say this to Count Stürm, and he was silent until the minister had departed. He then insisted on his gentlemen helping him out of his bed, but could not walk far, and sat down heavily, feeling robbed of his strength, and wondering what sickness had fallen on him. He demanded that enquiries should be sent to Madame Rocklitz, whether she was in the palace or whether she had returned to her own house. He could not recall if he had spent the night in her apartment or not; he had woken in his own, and it seemed inconceivable that he had been interrupted with her and carried there; but he could not trust himself to speak of any of these things, but puzzled over them in his confused mind, sunk in a chair by the stove in his bedgown, half asleep again.

The sickness of the Elector and his enquiries for Madame Rocklitz came quickly to the ears of her father, never for long far from the Residenzschloss, nor indeed from the apartments of the Elector. He did not like this news—he was afraid that if the Elector was ill he might be taken with a pious fit; he

saw, later that morning, the Electress and certain clergymen going into the young man's chamber, and this sent an ugly fear creeping round his heart; Neitschütz did not like either Ferdinand Stürm's brisk, sly looks and the way he went easily and delicately with his invalidish step and tapping cane about the corridors and antechambers of the Residenzschloss. Neitschütz believed the minister had been dismissed, but there appeared no sign of his leaving his duties; he had been that morning in consultation with Rébénec, who did not look as discomfited as he should have done; then there was the queer news that Marshal de Haverbeck had left Dresden taking leave of no one. Neitschütz went quickly and heavily through the streets in which the snow had now melted, and which were fresh with the pleasant April air, to his daughter's house in the quiet square in the Neustadt. He listened to no excuse of her fatigue or illness; indeed, the tale that she, together with the Elector, might be ill filled him with a new and deeper misgiving; he thought of infection, of smallpox, which neither had had; he forced into her room, putting her women rudely aside. He had no sooner opened the door than he paused, startled in his rude entry, for he had surprised her on her knees.

"You praying, Madelon?"

He spoke coarsely to cover his awkwardness.

The Countess Rocklitz had risen instantly to her feet. She had been kneeling before a wide chair with arms covered in white flowered satin. Her face had been in her hands and her bright head bent. She wore a loose morning robe of muslin and silk, and a fur tippet; she shuddered continually although the fire was close to her. Her father, peering at her nervously and anxiously, thought she did not look ill, but fatigued; and in quick, hoarse, alarmed tones he told her of the malady of the Elector, the satisfied air of Stürm, and the fact that the divines and the Electress had gone to the room of Johann Georg. . . .

"Poor wretch," murmured Madelon.

"And I do not like the looks of Stürm," repeated Neitschütz, fixing her with a hostile glance from his hollow light eyes, "flit-

ting about the Residenz as sly as the devil—I thought the Elector gave him his dismissal last night, but there's no talk of it. Haverbeck has gone on a sudden, and left Dresden. I could see that Colt and Spanheim were uneasy—why has Haverbeck gone?"

"Ay, he will have left Dresden, he has done his work," murmured Madelon. "What do you want of me?"

"Why, I want you to come to the Residenz at once," declared her father, "at once; you do not want that other woman to get any influence over him, do you? After all, he is only a fool and a boy, and he may get frightened when he is ill. Who knows what's the matter with him? Were you with him last night?"

"I left him about ten o'clock," said Madelon, dully.

"Well, he may be sleeping off his drink, or he may have caught a malady—how do I know? But it's best that you should come at once to the palace and not mope here. What's the matter with you, my girl? You look poorly and sullen."

"Why should I," asked Madelon, "look gay?"

"Why should you not look gay?" snarled her father, with a certain fury. "Have you not got every woman's heart's desires? Why did you come here last night? Why didn't you stay with him?"

Madelon vaguely shook her head.

"I can't always be at this play," she said. "Sometimes, my father, one longs for solitude; sometimes I wish that I could leave it all—sometimes I have no heart for the game."

Grim and angry, with his heavy figure, menacing, haggard face, and gaunt look, her father stood over her.

"What are you ranting about, my girl? Leave it all! What do you mean? Must I be plagued with *your* whims as well? Your brother Casimir has been in another brawl and it will take all I can do to gloss it over. I have wished him dead—the obstacle he has been to us. You must marry him to a fortune and get him from the court—"

"A fortune!" cried Madelon, striking one hand on the other, "have we not got enough, my father—must you still be talking of

fortunes and marrying for fortunes! Sometimes I feel I can't go on. Haven't we had enough these last few months, haven't you been glutted, all of you?"

"What talk's this?" he demanded, roughly. "Have the clergy been getting hold of you, too—whining round you with their pious talk and canting prayers?"

"None of the clergy have been talking to me," she replied. "Am I not an outcast from the Church?"

"Brace yourself," commanded Neitschütz, sternly. "Our affairs have gone wrong, I don't know what, but I scent mischief. I did not like Stürm's damned face; you should have got rid of him before—the sly, mean, cold devil, creeping round to lick one's hands and fawning to keep his place!"

"Never mind him," said Madelon, wearily. "What harm can he do us?"

"Put up your hair and dress yourself," said her father, eyeing her with disapproval and hostility. "You look but a pale, weary creature in that attire. You must not fade yet, Madelon—have you been crying or lying awake?"

He took her chin in his cold heavy hand and tipped her face towards him.

Madame Rocklitz snatched away.

"Leave me alone. I'll come to the Residenz. Everything will be all right when he sees me. Don't touch me, Father."

Neitschütz would not leave her. He remained in her house until she left her woman's hands and, perfumed and powdered and curled, the yellow locks piled high, and dressed in silver brocades and the Wettin diamonds, handsomely hooded in white furs, was ready to accompany him to the Residenzschloss.

Madelon found the Elector alone in his room; his wife's visit had been brief, and that of the clergy briefer.

The young man was dressed, though carelessly, but very pale. Never before had she seen him without his high colour; and the change in his face was noticeable. A large white dog slept beside him, it had its head on his knee, and Johann Georg caressed it with a fierce tenderness, as if he implored understanding, pro-

tection and compassion from the animal. Madelon believed that he would remember nothing of the night before. She advanced with a light word and a gay caressing gesture. He put her off, holding her two hands down in one of his, and asked:

"What was that you gave me last night, Madelon?"

"I—what should I have given you? I don't remember—yes, we drank a cordial together."

"And you went home after all," he insisted, looking at her with eyes that seemed of a crude brightness in the pallor of his face—the yellowish pallor. "After I had asked you to stay with me, Madelon?"

"You fell asleep," she said; "you went to sleep in my room."

"Ay, it *was* your room I went to sleep in, was it?" And he muttered that over to himself and dropped her hands. "But it was my own room I woke in. Who found me, Madelon—what happened?"

He rose with a tearing violence.

"God's thunder! tell me what you gave me last night—and that other night at Arnsdorf—I can remember it even now . . . a small greenish glass and a little flagon."

"Why, that," she exclaimed, faltering, and her colour coming, "that was some of our native wine, from our own grapes, and I kept it there in a little cabinet as it was the last we had. What do you mean?"

"I had best not tell you what I mean, Madelon; I do not know myself—my head is not clear, and I've been deadly sick. Why should you have left me last night?"

"You slept," she repeated, "you slept."

"Ay, who made me sleep?" enquired the wretched young man. "It was an ill slumber, too."

"I have enemies," protested Madelon, "who have put horrible things upon me. I do not wish to know what you mean—you have been ill, a fever, as I suppose. Let us leave Dresden. Come away with me to the Moritzburg. There is sunshine today and the snow has melted, and we might be free of them all."

He looked at her and groaned.

"Do you want to come away with me, Madelon, would you be happy—alone with me? Oh, my God! if only you wouldn't lie to me—it does torment me so."

"Look at me," she answered, "and then think I lie!"

She had not yet lost her empire over him, did not even fear to lose it—how easy it was to hold him; her father need not have been troubled, nor Stürm triumphant; she smiled with a soft and melting compassion as she saw the expression of tender subjection come into his eyes, as he moved towards her with eager devotion and seized her hands and kissed them with a sigh of relief, as if the bad dream of another absence from her was over and he had wakened to the lustre of life and love in her presence.

"Surely," she said, gently, "you will be assailed by fears and suspicions, but you must treat them in a princely fashion, and, as enemies, put them to rout. You must be firmer, your Highness, with your enemies and mine. Count Stürm . . . I hear he is still in the Residenzschloss."

"And you asked his dismissal," remarked Johann Georg, remembering that with a sudden uneasy pang.

"No, I did not ask his dismissal," sighed Madelon, "it matters very little to me, as you know; I have allowed him to be where he is ever since I came to Dresden, although he has often grossly insulted my father and my brothers in the past. But, let that go, yet, how can a minister wish to remain in office when all his policies have been reversed? And he was ever for the French. When Rébénec leaves Dresden, surely Count Stürm will wish to go?"

"Ay, ay," muttered Johann Georg, trying to piece together the confusions of his thoughts on this matter. "Certainly, he will wish to go. I have scarcely seen him this morning, yet he was by my bedside early, he was there when I woke."

"Ah," said Madelon, "sitting by your bedside when you woke? Was not that strange?"

She wondered whether it was Count Stürm who had found the Elector in her room and had him carried to his own apart-

ments . . . she hoped this might be the work of servants, but it was odd they should have dared disturb him; she would have to go into that.

She said no more of this, not wishing to give too serious a flavour to the matter; but exerted herself with a fierce effort—for her head was heavy and her heart heavier still—to amuse, divert, entertain and caress the Elector. She mused on their coming journey to Moritzburg and on how pleasant it would be there and how soon the green would tint the glades. And they might go riding there in the fresh blue spring air, which would yet be spiced with winter—they would refurnish the light, high painted rooms, and as he had promised her, have the great bedchamber which she had always loved rehung with rose red damask. They would carry down there some of the treasures from the green vaults—the onyx and heliotrope vases perhaps, and set them in the wide niches in the orangery which were as yet empty; plant out the parterres, too, for he had a passion for gardening, design new hornbeam screens and plan another pond full of gorgeous fish, make Moritzburg the pleasantest place in the world. . . . There was a fountain, too, that needed replenishing so that the jets might rise higher, with a more shining speed. . . . So she brought before his drowsy mind a hundred agreeable and lively images which seemed to open the warm, dull room wide on the fresh sweet air, the airy trees, the quickly-moving clouds, and the incessant sunshine of spring and summer, the sights and sounds of the country life he loved so well.

The Elector's sickness passed off and he forgot the tedious, horrid sleep in which he had lain and which had left behind so sour and ghostly a flavour.

He ordered wine, something to take away the heavy taste from his mouth; when he had taken that he revived and conversed with Madelon gaily enough, and entered into all her plans, he was for sending for the architect and the gardener that they might see the experts' schemes and tell them their own—why not go at once to Moritzburg? Madelon put him off; told him that he must remain at the Residenzschloss for a while, until

Haverbeck had gone, at least—that was but courtesy to the Imperial Envoy.

"Haverbeck has gone," said the Elector, with a sudden frown.

"Yes, but he will return," smiled Madelon, lightly; "he has not yet taken leave. Nor has your Highness finally arranged for the campaign. After all, you must remember that our pleasure will be snatched and small, there will not be long at the Moritzburg; you must be in the field by May—and that's too late for the Allies' taste."

At this disappointment the Elector became moody, preoccupied and troubled, but sparkled into some kind of fire when she began to encourage him by the thought of his martial exploits—how fine a figure he would make at the head of his armies, how glorious it would be to hear the *Te Deums* sung, and see the French flying before him, how rapturously she would receive him the night after victory; then he would feel himself a great prince indeed.

Their dinner was served in his room and he remained there shut up with her well into the afternoon, audiences refused to all.

Ferdinand Stürm waited. He had neatly laid his mine, it was exactly in place; he had but to put the match to it and destroy all his enemies, however proudly they were entrenched in what they believed their impregnable citadel; he, too, dined comfortably, playing with his monkey.

Late that afternoon, when the Elector, still a little weak, was walking in the small enclosed formal garden of the Residenzschloss, Count Stürm, who had had his every movement watched and detailed to him, contrived to take the air in the same trim alley. Madame Rocklitz had gone riding with her father. She seemed to like to defy the public hate; she had gone, in person, to inspect the goods of a china merchant who had sent a humble submission that he had brought a number of curiosities and new-fangled rarities into the city which were worthy of her glance.

Count Stürm, warmly wrapped against the cold, but still shuddering, remarked, leaning heavily on his cane which had become a little stouter of late:

"Both the women have been arrested, your Highness."

"Women? Eh, eh, what women?" demanded the Elector, stopping in his slow walk.

"Fani von Ilten and her partner—you remember that they were implicated in these cases of witchcraft which have long been disturbing the police; and your Highness gave me permission—"

"Yes," interrupted the Elector, uneasily, "but it's an ugly matter, and I'll not be troubled with it. I do not want them questioned or put to the torture—I cannot forget that Madame de Rosny was the ancient governess of Madelon Rocklitz—get them out of the country."

Stürm shrugged.

"It has been done, it is the usual procedure. It required very little—a mere turn of the rack—and they confessed. Come, Highness, with me behind this hedge—there are others observing us and I would not let them see your countenance change."

And with that, weak and feeble as he seemed, he gave the Prince a fierce grip on the arm and pulled him, stupid and bewildered, behind one of the high hornbeam hedges, now bare, save for a few rusty leaves, but still a sufficient protection against both wind and curious glances.

"Confessed! What have they confessed?" stammered the Elector, struggling with his confused wits.

"This. That Madame Rocklitz has been to their house several times and on many occasions bought drugs. Last night she bought three different drugs—three bottles in a leathern case—she was disguised as a youth."

"Last night!" repeated the Elector, in what seemed an recess of stupidity.

"Your Highness, when I found you about one o'clock this morning, you were huddled in your chair, drugged. You had been drenched with laudanum. It was her room, but she was not there."

"Where did she go?" demanded the Elector, thickly, like one speaking in a confusion that amounted to a trance. "Was that what was the matter with me? I was drugged!"

"You're sick from it still, sir," said Stürm, with a coldness that was almost brutal. "It was laudanum—I could smell it, there was a stain on your lace. She went last evening to get it, after she had spent the afternoon with Haverbeck. Take care, sir, or you'll fall. Sit down!" and with a quick gesture he indicated a small stone seat placed in the centre of the hornbeam hedge.

The Elector sank on to it, shivering, shuddering, and muttering words that the minister could not understand.

"No matter for all that, Highness, listen to what I have to say. When she left you drugged she went back to her own house, and not ten minutes afterwards Marshal de Haverbeck came there, in one of your coaches, attended by one of your men. My agents brought me this information. You were drugged and could give no orders, so I took the responsibility on myself. I had him arrested as he left."

"Arrested?" stammered Johann Georg.

"I took that responsibility, sir. It was the only way to put his visit beyond dispute—confronted, they could not deny it—it is impossible for him to deny it, for several people saw him leave the house. You can see him yourself if you will, sir, and learn much from his silence."

The Elector, who did not appear to understand any of this rapid speech, repeated again, so foolishly that Stürm really feared his wits were scattered:

"Arrested, eh, what's that you say?"

"Of course he must be released tomorrow—it can pass as an absence on his estates—he'll hardly complain, because of scandal, though his indiscretion will hardly save the Rocklitz."

"You damned old eavesdropper!" shouted the Elector, suddenly in a fury. "I'll give *you* a turn or two on the rack and see what they squeeze out of *you!*"

"Madame Rocklitz is indicted of witchcraft by the confessions—still incomplete—one will be put to the question again tonight—of these two women," replied Stürm, unperturbed.

He held a gleaming object out on his hand.

"You, sir, know this toy?"

The Elector stared at the golden egg.

"She gave it," said the minister, "to this Rosny as an earnest of a fee."

"Where is Haverbeck?" groaned the Elector.

"In the Koenigsberg."

TWENTY-ONE

Marshal de Haverbeck was lodged in the Koenigsberg; his chamber appeared to him to have been prepared for a common criminal; he considered his arrest a piece of marvellous effrontery that only the supremely reckless malice of a woman would have dared. In every detail he saw feminine spite. He was confident that a man of his position, the Imperial Envoy, could not be long detained, and he did not see that those who had participated in this affair could avoid a deadly scandal. Being hardy and used to discomfort, and fresh from campaigning, he slept easily enough on the rough bed provided and ate with appetite enough of the rough fare in the morning; but he insistently demanded his body servant and his clothes, and an interview with the governor of the Koenigsberg. The gaoler promised to take the messages, but the day went on and no one came near the prisoner. The hours dragged dismally on and the solitude became almost insupportable to the strong impatient man. He began to rage under a sense of intolerable outrage and bitter injustice; he was amazed that his colleagues and servant, nay, all the court of Dresden, had not missed him by now and procured his release. When the short winter afternoon was fading into evening and his room with the thickly-barred high-set window had long been almost completely dark, they brought him in a supper and a light, and he again haughtily demanded his servant. The man who waited on him, gaoler or soldier, said again that he would speak to the governor. He returned presently with the prison barber with orders to shave the Marshal de Haverbeck and dress his hair; this was all the concession the governor could permit.

"But in the morning, sir, you may send for your clean linen and your toilet and servant; but for tonight, this is all that may be permitted."

"Send in the morning!" exclaimed Haverbeck. "How long am I to be detained here? You know who I am, do you not?"

"I know very well, sir, but that is no business of mine."

The man, who was a superior type for his office, grey and thoughtful, withdrew.

The barber bowed and promised that he would do his best, and often enough had shaved and dressed the hair of fine gentlemen.

"Their last toilet, I do not doubt," smiled Haverbeck, grimly.

The barber, who was a little, light, dry fellow, said that had sometimes been the case—only that afternoon he had had to cut off the hair of two old women, who had been put on to the rack.

"Such a screeching as there was!" he added. "And they confessing almost before the screws were turned; and great names they brought out, too, as I heard."

"Be silent," said Haverbeck, sternly; "I want to hear no such foul tales."

The barber grinned mildly and set about his work which was not unskilful. He manipulated his bowl and his soap and his mirror deftly enough, and said nothing more about the secrets of the torture chamber or the dark and bloody recesses of the Koenigsberg, but shaved the soldier and dressed his dark, disordered hair, and told Haverbeck that he might thank the governor for a very great favour, for he had known fine gentlemen come in there and lie without attention until their beards were at their waists. The late Elector had been a very vindictive and arbitrary man, but the present Prince was thought mild, save where black magic was concerned; no one but witches and warlocks had been tortured in the Koenigsberg since he came to the throne.

"Yours is an odd office," smiled Haverbeck, amused at the little fellow's dry matter-of-fact way. "I suppose you become used to pain and despair and horror?"

"You ought to know, sir. You've been to the wars."

"That's under the open sky—that is in the way of honour. To

die like that is good fortune, barber; it would be a foul end to die in the Koenigsberg."

The barber replaced his instruments in his case, picked up his basin, and tapped at the door; it was opened cautiously by the sentry.

"What is that?" asked Haverbeck, pausing with his untied cravat in his hand.

Shrieks and moans and wavering imprecations were coming from the passage; these trailed into incoherent gibbering.

"They have lodged you near the torture-room for women," whispered the barber, looking back, "and I believe they are putting the surviving witch to the question again."

Haverbeck fastened his cravat in silence; the door closed on the barber and the key turned in the lock; the soldier put the tray of coarse food out of his disgusted sight by throwing the coarse napkin over it; then sat down on the only chair, and folded his arms.

He wondered if they would dare keep him another night in the Koenigsberg. Was she so powerful and so skilful? It began to occur to him that she might have been adroit enough to find some plausible excuse for his disappearance, and he remembered that he had talked of going to his estates. Perhaps, for a day or so, even his own servants might be confused into thinking that; she had such power and so much money at her command. In that case he would have to rot here until it pleased her to set him free. Not that it would be for long—a few days at the most—Colt and Spanheim would begin to smell mischief, and there would be enquiries from Vienna. But it was atrocious, it was intolerable to have to spend even hours in this vile room. He longed to walk up and down but would not do so, for he knew that it would give him a keener sense of his confinement. He had paced up and down and touched the walls so close together, here, there, here, there—just a few paces apart—then the other way the room or cell was narrower still—here, there, here, there—a wall—a few steps—a wall. Never before in his life had

his liberty been curtailed. The full horror of his helplessness swept over the soldier, set the blood tingling in his face and burning in his temples; then he recovered himself, laughing.

"A brave man should be prepared for anything, any manner of experience. And I have all my life before me, and this will soon be forgotten."

He began to cast over the future—the welcome that would meet him at Vienna—the friendship of the Emperor and the companionship of his fellow-soldiers—all the wide, fine active life that was there waiting for him—and this but an ugly episode to be soon forgotten, not, perhaps, so easily endured—but soon forgotten. His sword was gone; it was odd to be without it; he put his hand continually to his hip, missing the feel of the familiar hilt—odd to be without a sword and powerless, shut in within these four walls.

The door opened and he turned eagerly, expecting the governor or some official with an order for his release. It was a powerfully-built young man, in a winter cloak and a riding mask, who entered. He closed the door behind him and again Haverbeck heard the sound of the key turned in the lock.

"Good evening, Marshal de Haverbeck," said the visitor in a muffled and deeply troubled voice.

The prisoner knew him at once for the Elector, rose, and became passionately and keenly alert, and turned over quickly in his mind what terms Madame Rocklitz could have made now with her lover to bring about this most ominous meeting.

Johann Georg snatched off his visor with a hasty and an unsteady hand, and peered at the prisoner, who instantly demanded, sternly:

"Was my most unjust arrest by the order of your Highness?"

While he spoke, a swift hope had crept into his mind—one that brightened all his distress—and that was that Madelon had had nothing to do with his imprisonment in the Koenigsberg after all but that the Elector had had him spied upon and arrested as he left her house. Haverbeck had not believed that before, but

now it came with a rare touch of consolation to his present distress; perhaps that officer had lied.

The Elector did not answer his imperious question.

"Whether, sir, you were arrested by my orders or not," he replied, sullenly, "you are in my prison and in my power now."

"It is unnecessary to remind me of that. As I am held here unjustly I hope I may expect a speedy release."

"You will soon know," muttered the Elector, "what to expect."

"Sir," said Haverbeck, barely able to control himself, "this will have a very ill look and make an ugly noise in the Empire. I do not know how the Emperor will take it, sir, but, believe me, not easily."

"Do not let that concern you. I hold my own affairs in my own hand—the Emperor be damned, and the Empire, too."

"You will have to answer for this," replied Haverbeck, with contempt; "and why have you come here now, sir, and what can we have to say to each other in such circumstances as we now stand?"

The Elector walked over to him and stood with folded arms close to him.

"You were arrested when leaving the house of Madame Rocklitz."

"On spies' information," replied Haverbeck, still in the dark as to the bottom of the affair.

The Elector did not answer that either. He paced up and down the narrow room, looking a considerable, almost a gigantic, figure of a man in the vague light, holding his hand to his side and now and then fetching a groan. At length he said:

"You have always importuned this lady with your addresses. She dislikes you; do you hear that?—she dislikes you. Last night was but designed to make you betray yourself, as you did."

He stopped close again, in his confined walking, to Haverbeck, and said, thickly:

"Tell me what happened—what passed between you—how long you were there?"

"How sunk you are to ask that question!" replied Haverbeck, sternly.

He wondered bitterly, "What manner of lies and how many lies has she told him—how has she blinded and fooled him? Or has she told him nothing, but he discovered it for himself? And how much does he know—and how in the Devil's name shall I get her out of it if they are not in league?"

The Elector guessed something of these thoughts of Haverbeck, for they had been put into his mind by Count Stürm—for himself he would not have thought of anything so subtle and ingenious; Stürm had reminded him again and again that his best and keenest revenge on Haverbeck would be to let him think the lady had betrayed him for so Stürm hoped to force the soldier's hand and obtain evidence against the Rocklitz, so Johann Georg turned about now and said violently and clumsily:

"She told me, you see, she told me everything—how you met in the Marienkirche near Bächnitz in the afternoon, and afterwards at her house, and all the while she was deceiving you."

Then he broke his speech and groaned again, for he could not look long at the tall handsome soldier, the fine straight dark features of Haverbeck, without thinking that last night while he lay drugged Madelon might have been in this man's arms—and they both laughing at him as a boyish fool.

"She has betrayed me," thought Haverbeck, "to the Elector, it was the safest thing she could do—and women have often done it before. Why, 'tis an old story—she could not forgive me for refusing her so must have accused me of molesting her—an obvious revenge."

He was silent, and waited, there being nothing that he, in such a situation, could say.

The Elector was at a loss and troubled, sick with rage and jealousy, and with despair, and tormented by a more awful emotion than any of these—a spreading, clutching hatred that squeezed his very heart and vitals in a hideous vice; a hatred inflamed by the other's pride and composed grandeur.

"Why did you go to her house last night?" he cried, in a violent storm. "Why did you dare to do it? Had you no respect for me, for her?"

Haverbeck reflected, not without irony, that it was almost impossible to tell the whole, and generally impossible, to tell even the partial truth where women were concerned. If he were to tell the facts, any of the facts now, it might damage, it might ruin, Madelon; he was still moving in the dark and did not know how much the Elector knew, nor what story she had told him.

He said, therefore, wearily:

"The fault, sir—if it can be called a fault—has been mine; you must not blame Madame Rocklitz. She played with me, as you suggest, no doubt, leave it at that. We cannot dispute over the lady's name."

The Elector stared with bitter suspicion into the steady dark eyes.

"I shall never get to the bottom of this," he muttered, "every way there are torment and confusion—I'll never untangle it all."

"Nor I, either, I think," smiled Haverbeck. "This interview but disturbs us both—it were wiser, sir, that you had not come. But I demand my instant release—for your own sake, sir, grant it, and for the lady's sake, or there will grow a scandal that will blight us all. For your private satisfaction and on my word of honour there have been no love passages between me and Madame Rocklitz."

The Elector did not answer, but stood sullenly, with a brutal look on his flushed features.

Haverbeck continued, in a rising passion though courteously controlled:

"It was ill done, sir, to have me arrested if you are responsible—I am no longer a subject of yours, but in the service of His Imperial Majesty, and I have been hauled off here as one arrested in a chance medley or a drunken brawl, denied even my body-servant and my clothes."

"Ah, you flourish very high, Marshal de Haverbeck," sneered Johann Georg, "but you should have thought of this before you

let your insolence have rein. I never liked you, nor your carriage —I do not believe your word—which you gave just now."

"It is more unprincely still," retorted Marshal de Haverbeck, colouring darkly, "to insult a man who is your prisoner and without a sword."

Johann Georg knew that if he stormed and menaced, entreated and pleaded all through the long weary night, he would get nothing more from him. The secret of what was between him and Madelon would remain a secret as far as Haverbeck was concerned; Johann Georg's own fury of rage and smarting despair was not satisfied by seeing his enemy thus humiliated and degraded before him, swordless, as he had said himself, and in the prison of a common criminal.

He frantically turned the weapon in the wound he had already made.

"It was by the wish of Madame Rocklitz that you were arrested—I only knew of it afterwards. It is by her wish I came to see you here. Believe me, she has none but scornful thoughts of you."

He struck cruelly in the dark, and did not know how near the possible truth he went.

To Delphicus de Haverbeck it seemed very likely that Madame Rocklitz had chosen that form of revenge.

"I pity your Highness, that you are so far lost in your passion that you expose yourself thus," and he moved away down the room, turning his back on the Elector.

Johann Georg stared at him over his shoulder as if to impress on his mind for ever that tall, grand and soldierly figure.

Then he went out with a drunken gait and stupid look, and closed the door, and for the third time Delphicus de Haverbeck heard the key turn in the lock.

He was alone for an hour, during which he, with difficulty, composed himself. Finally, taking a pencil and a tablet of paper from his pocket—for they had left him such trifles as these—he worked out a mathematical problem carefully, exactly till his brain was as steady as his hand, and he could affront whatever

was before him; there could hardly be a greater bitterness than this treachery of poor Madelon.

His next visitor, and he judged by now it was well on into the night, was the gaoler. This man cleared away the untouched supper, and trimmed the lamp, quiet, grey, thoughtful.

"You have heard nothing about my release?" demanded Marshal de Haverbeck, putting away his tablet and wondering how he could put through another long solitude.

"No, sir, I have heard nothing about that," replied the fellow, queerly, "but they are sending someone to see you, and perhaps he'll have news—just a moment, he will be here in a moment."

Marshal de Haverbeck waited impatiently for this new visitor who, it proved, was a Lutheran pastor, of a decent and pleasant aspect, who entered with an air of surprise and looked about him, amazed, it would seem, both by the cell and by the splendid occupant.

Marshal de Haverbeck saluted him civilly and waited for him to declare his errand; but the pastor, who was a youngish man, continued in an amaze, looking at the soldier's handsome uniform, his epaulettes, his braid, his sash and baldric from which no sword hung, at his dark beauty and stately grace, and then round the four ugly walls, the high-set dim lantern, the high-set barred window, the rough bed, chair, and table.

The gaoler glanced from one gentleman to the other and fingered his chin.

"Tell me," asked the pastor of this personage, "am I in the right room? I was sent for by the governor of the Koenigsberg on a certain errand, but there, I believe, is some error."

"What was your errand?" asked Marshal de Haverbeck.

The pastor seemed unwilling to disclose this.

"This is the gentleman," said the gaoler, "that you were to see. You are to be left with him half an hour. He has been amusing himself, reverend sir, by doing problems," the grey man smiled, "I saw him through the grating of the door, writing away this hour. I've got some writing to do, too, sir. I was told to put this up on the wall of your room."

He took a piece of chalk out of his pocket and sharpened it with a small knife.

Haverbeck looked at him indifferently, thinking this was some rude joke on the fellow's part, and also indifferently at the pastor who, he believed, had indeed been sent to him by some error, for he was a complete stranger to the man.

The gaoler went to the wall opposite to where the lantern hung, and which was tolerably clear in those dim rays, and with the piece of chalk wrote out:

> *Delphicus Secundus Hyacinthus Lüneburg de Haverbeck, Baron, and Count of the Holy Roman Empire, Field-Marshal in the Imperial Army, in this room met his fate, the Seventh of April, 1693.*

Then he turned, and was walking unconcernedly away, and closing the door on the two of them, when the pastor called out:

"Hold! do not leave me shut up here with this gentleman whom I do not know, and who is in perfect health. There is some mistake. I must be taken immediately to the governor."

"There is no mistake, and you are in the right room," replied the gaoler, unlocking the door.

"That is impossible," returned the pastor, uneasily, "for I was called to administer to a dying man."

The gaoler closed the door. Once more the key turned in the lock.

TWENTY-TWO

The young pastor looked up at the gentleman with whom he was imprisoned, then at the rude writing which the gaoler had just chalked on the wall.

"Are those your names and titles, sir?" he asked, in great agitation.

"They are," replied Marshal de Haverbeck, "mine."

"The great soldier—the Imperial Envoy," murmured the pastor. "I have read, sir, of your exploits in the *Gazette,* and the other day watched you pass through the streets with much pomp and magnificence."

"And you have been sent," smiled Haverbeck, "to soften another passing, to see a dying man, you said?"

"Yes, sir," answered the pastor, much troubled. "I have visited prisoners sometimes in their last moments, these have been occasions of great tribulation and distress to me, yet matters that I could in no way shirk. They were put upon my conscience before God. And this evening I was sent for hurriedly by the governor of the prison, and told there was one among the prisoners who was to die tonight, and I might do what I could for him. But, surely, sir—"

He paused and gazed painfully at the splendid soldier, strong, handsome, full of life, of grandeur and power.

"You are not ill?" questioned the man of God, uneasily.

"I am not ill," replied Haverbeck, "yet it might be that I am to die tonight."

He added:

"Have you been sworn to secrecy?"

"Why, yes, sir, I was." The pastor was in a deeper amazement and distress. "On my visits to the Koenigsberg it is usual,

and tonight I made nothing of it, I allowed myself to be sworn, both as to the identity of the prisoner and anything that might pass between me and him."

"And the governor?" questioned Haverbeck, sternly, "told you that you were to administer to a dying man?"

"God help me, sir, that is what he said."

Haverbeck took a turn up and down the room. Could it be possible that her malice was stretched so far? It might be. Outraged in her last pride, she had wrought upon herself to do this? It might be the boy, but Haverbeck did not believe so. This was the stroke of a furious woman. The boy would not bring himself to such dishonour, and scarcely venture such a crime; it would be a dangerous action for a prince. But a woman, transported with love and hate, would not think of danger.

He looked at the chalk writing on the stone. The gaoler must have been told to do that in order to give him some warning. The names and titles were correctly placed and spelt. The fellow must have had it written down and got it by heart. All this had been done to show that there was no mistake.

"Oh, sir," cried the pastor, standing at the table in the deepest confusion and distress. "What is this? Surely this cannot be? They cannot venture a violence on the person of one like your Excellency—so well-known, so high-placed?"

Haverbeck interrupted him:

"This will not be the first or last mystery of the Koenigsberg; no doubt they will find a way to put a gloss on it. Look you," he added, fixing his dark and generous glance on the pastor. "This is a matter entirely political, and there is nothing else in it but that. I have come here on matters of state and walked, it seems, into a trap; believe that always."

He took out his watch.

"Half an hour, did the man say? Well, I suppose five minutes of it have gone. I beg your silence, sir, while I think how I may best employ what time remains."

A murder; it was intended to murder him; that seemed in-

credibly horrid and stupid; but he knew such deeds were done; General von Schulenburg, taking the waters at Badheim, had been arrested on suspicion of dealing with the French and disappeared; Neumann, the Brandenburg Resident in Berlin, had been found strangled in the Spree; Kniphausen, the young Dutch soldier, suspected of being the lover of the Duchess of Hesse, had gone from his lodgings in Cassel never to be seen again,—this secret, violent end had come to other men as young and lusty as himself. Yes, it must be faced that what threatened was very possible.

The soldier sat down at the table, on which he clasped his fine hands and stared in front of him, forgetful of his frightened companion, of his sombre surroundings, he communed with the man he had been, the man he might have been; he had achieved success with such brilliant ease, been without effort or difficulty ahead of his companions in everything, from scholarship and accomplishments, from turning a Latin verse or riding the great horse, to the intricacies of tactics and military science, that only a native sweetness had saved him from feeling contempt for his fellows. Despite his easy pre-eminence, his rapid advancement, his generous good humour had made him hosts of friends; admiration and affection had always smoothed his path; there had never been any difficulty in his life save this long, deep, idealistic love for Madelon von Neitschütz—and that had brought him to this dreadful conclusion of all his activities, his hopes, his expectations, his pleasures; he had greatly enjoyed life. He was thirty, in the first glow of his mature manhood—he supposed that they would take him out and shoot him in a ditch and bury him in it. Curious how he had always loathed the Koenigsberg; he smiled at the irony of his own fate; why thus he had seen, when one of the Christian forts on the Tisza was being rescued from the heathen, all prepared, the troops within fuzee-shot of the citadel, rampart, bastion, hornwork, taken, the men advancing under bomb proof shelter—a breach in the last walls—and then a chance bullet cut some captain off as, flushed with triumph, he stormed to victory so he had advanced, with such flashing ease to

storm the heights of worldly success, and so been cut off in sight of the conquered eminence where he hoped to plant his standard.

Ah, this was a galling conclusion—he, trained to command, used to authority, masterful and passionate beneath his amiable courtesy, found it go hard with him to face so mean a death! Unable to endure his silence the distracted divine drew near the prisoner.

"It cannot be," he whispered, "that a murder or an execution is intended."

But he spoke without hope, for he knew that he dealt in matters too deep for him, and he was aware that that very day they had been torturing witches in the Koenigsberg, and extracting from them deadly evidence. His own oath of secrecy lay heavy upon him. He gazed upon Haverbeck with awe and terror, yet could not find himself able to pity one who was so grand and serene.

The soldier, whose magnanimous mind was clear, was reasoning calmly with himself.

She would have to do it quickly, it would be very perilous for her to wait. By the morning she would have repented. Perhaps she intended to do it in her house.

"I thought it was but some poor silly love-charm she had in that bottle, but maybe it was another matter."

"It's just possible it might be the boy—he was transported beside himself with jealousy; though his heart is good enough he might be brought to this. Yet I think it is her hand in this, and, even if he is cognizant, it is her deed; for she, as he said, set on to me, and hardly would he have invented that—he is a gentleman."

The prisoner's thoughts flashed backwards. He remembered a certain birthday of Madelon's, when he had arrived from Paris and first asked her hand from her father. She was a child then and playing at a fountain; so lovely, tender and sweet she had been. It seemed odd and horrible that this had come out of that. . . . He saw, too, the day when he had ridden away under

the brazen thundering sky and seen the lightning strike across the Koenigsberg which now enclosed him.

To die tonight.

He was thirty years of age and had a career of honour, of splendour, of glory and pleasure before him.

He loved every detail of life.

He had been very confident of himself and very sure that no woman would interrupt him, much less bring him down.

And now—he laughed at himself—like when one takes a city and circumvents the demilunes, the ravelins, the counterscarp, and all the intricate defences, to be blown up by a sudden secret mine when in sight of the citadel.

The pastor spoke with dry lips and throat:

"Oh, sir, the time passes on, and if you think this be more than a menace or a jest, let me know how I can help you."

Haverbeck's dark eyes scrutinized him curiously. He had not taken much notice of the poor young man; now he considered this perhaps was his last chance to send some message to the outer world, and he answered:

"Well, there is a letter or two I might write, if you could deliver it, without abuse to yourself. I have neither pen, ink nor paper; for I have been here most uncivilly entertained. There are my tablets and I might write on those."

"I will do," replied the pastor, eagerly, "anything that your Excellency may command."

"It will be very little," smiled Haverbeck.

He took out his tablets, pulled off a sheet and wrote in cypher —to Maestro Steffani, Master of the Chapel of the Duke of Lüneburg-Brunswick—a post that he, Haverbeck, had contrived for the old Italian. The letter read:

I believe I have come, my dear Maestro, on my death tonight, and purely through my own fault on a political matter. You will understand that I always took this hazard and do not regret the cast I made. My attorneys have my affairs in hand and they

and my bankers between them will set out my fortune according to my directions. My will is sealed up and witnessed. I have not so much to leave, but I believe it is fairly distributed. His Serene Highness the Duke of Lüneburg-Brunswick has promised to be a guardian to my boy, and I do beg you to give an eye to him, and make him, if you can, a scholar and a soldier. If you could come at any of my personal affairs, such as the ring given to me by the Emperor, my sword, armour and horses, and set of diamond buttons, I wish that the boy may have them—some of these are in my lodging at Dresden, but I believe it may be difficult that you get them. The gentleman who delivers you this letter may have been put to some great inconvenience in the so doing, and I beg you to reward him with some trifle, befitting his rank and profession. Adieu, my dear Maestro, believe me, that in these last minutes, some of my pleasantest recollections are of you and your music.

Delphicus Secundus Hyacinthus Lüneburg de Haverbeck.

He had no means of sealing this letter, and the pastor saw him look round in a momentary embarrassment, and assured him, eagerly:

"I can swear, sir, not to read what you have written."

"It is no matter," said Haverbeck, with a smile, "and it is in cypher."

He folded the paper across and gave it to the pastor.

There was another letter to write—and this far more difficult, and this could not be in cypher or shorthand—he did not believe she knew either. A difficult letter to write and very little time in which to write it. He reflected. Madelon. Madame. Fräulein von Neitschütz. Nay, give her the title for which she had paid so high—Madame the Countess Rocklitz. He wrote steadily in his beautiful clear handwriting.

Madame the Countess Rocklitz,

I have never written to you before, but I may do so now, since you have put it out of my power ever to write to anyone again.

We do not shape events by talking of them, and the means by which you and I have come to this have been, perhaps, beyond mortal control. It is in your power to take my life, and in mine to die and smile at you, so at the last we stand equal. Were your happiness within my wish you should have it, but I believe you lost this chance with other things last summer. I may write now what I never could have written or said in any other way. I came to Dresden solely to see you again; easily could I have avoided the embassy, but this was my motive—I loved you, and always have. I would, my dear, that this had been enough for you, but you have pulled our fortunes all awry, and so we are neither of us what we might have been.

The pastor to whom I must give this is one, perhaps, sent by you to ease my soul, but I do not fear, my dear, but that God will deal generously with a lover and a sinner. Madelon, do you remember the fountain at Arnsdorf?

Madame, the Countess Rocklitz, I give you farewell, and believe that I have always been your sincere lover.

Delphicus Secundus Hyacinthus Lüneburg de Haverbeck.

He folded up his letter several times, frowning. Here was a difficulty—how to get it delivered without betraying her? He could not even seal it. He untied one of the narrow black ribbons that held the ruffles at his wrist and knotted it several times round the folded paper, then gave it to the clergyman. There was no other way.

"Will you deliver this to Madame the Countess Rocklitz?" he said, quietly; "she has some affairs of mine in hand; but this must be done secretly, so as to involve her in no scandal or curiosity. Do you understand?"

"I understand very well, sir," replied the pastor, putting away the second letter with trembling fingers. "And I will do exactly as you bid me and observe the utmost secrecy, so I swear! But, oh, sir, it is a fearful moment, and can it be that what you think is true—that they will come here? Oh, sir, by what means will it be?"

"I am unarmed," replied Haverbeck, "and it might be by any means."

"Can you face it?" shuddered the pastor, trying in vain for self-control equal to that of the soldier. "You are a very brave man, sir, but is this not a frightful test?"

"I've seen men die," replied Haverbeck, "often enough, and have not thought much of it, and have been prepared to die myself, often enough, and have not thought much of that either—a ball or a bullet in the trenches, a sword or pistol in the charge—I've taken that hazard often enough, sir."

"But this is different," replied the white-faced clergyman. "Here, in the Koenigsberg, alone, cut off so suddenly in the full bloom and flourish of your manhood."

"Remind me not of that," smiled Haverbeck.

On the third page of his tablets he was tracing a few bars of music—*Rondo alla Turca*—that he had written on the night of the thunderstorm when he had ridden away from Arnsdorf.

"Sir, I have been sent to minister to you," said the trembling pastor, bracing himself to his duty. "But you seem a man beyond that—who has made up his accounts even with God. What can I say or do? I have here my book—would you like me to pray with you? Or can I give you absolution?"

"Who can give me that?" smiled Haverbeck. "I was at church two days ago. Let that pass. I have never been one to give much importance to forms, sir. I believe that I have run level with my conscience."

"It will be a bloody and cruel deed," muttered the clergyman, pacing up and down, "and a waste of a fine heroic man."

He looked with the wildest regret at the dark grace and stern beauty of the soldier sitting by the table writing his music with a steady hand; the fine outline of the serene face on which was a bright nobility, the clear eyes beneath the slanting brows, the full lips that had lost none of their colour, but were firmly set in a little smile of resolution.

"Ah, sir," he cried in his simplicity, "what has your Excellency

been involved in to come to such an ugly and untimely fate? What mischance brought you down so low?"

"So low," replied the soldier, "why, I am high enough." He pulled out his watch:

"I perceive that half an hour has nearly gone, and I must beg you, sir, to command yourself. I do not know what they intend, be not, therefore, taken by surprise by what may occur."

"I can scarcely endure it," protested the clergyman desperately, "it should not have been put upon me."

He went to the heavy door and beat upon it with frantic impotent hands.

"Hush!" commanded Haverbeck in a stern tone, turning round in his seat. "Leave that, it will avail us nothing."

He put his hand in his pocket, endeavouring to think of something to distract and calm the clergyman, and took out a rouleau of rix-dollars, which he had put there earlier in the evening, intending them for his play among his friends. He laid these now upon the table.

"Take those, sir, for your poor; you must know those who will need them. If they are left in my pocket they will fall into less worthy hands."

Shivering and yellow pale, the wretched clergyman fumbled the paper of money into his pocket.

"Command yourself," said the soldier, sternly; "it is but to see a man die—you must have been at many a deathbed?"

"But this is murder," muttered the clergyman. "You, so young and strong."

"Therefore, I can the more easily compose myself," smiled Haverbeck. "The fire in the stove has sunk out, and I think you are cold—it must be with the cold you shiver."

"Ah, God, pity us!" exclaimed the clergyman on a harsh shriek, as the key turned in the lock, and he made to fling himself by Haverbeck's side and catch him by the hand.

The soldier rose:

"Control yourself," he said in a voice of flashing command, "nor disgrace this moment."

The heavy door swung on its hinges and four men entered in dark and shameful attire, wearing stained leather aprons and having bare arms.

Behind them was the quiet grey gaoler, who motioned for the clergyman to leave.

"Remember my letters," said Haverbeck, sternly, to him.

The clergyman would have resisted, would have clung to the prisoner, but the soldier severely commanded him to be gone, and the gaoler pushed him, heaving sick, out of the prison door.

The four men, as the door closed, remained under the yellow lamp light at a pause, and the soldier, standing the other side of the table, faced them, as if they were four criminals and he their judge. They were indeed overawed before his grace and dignity, his strength and serenity, and the magnificence of his appointments.

"Well, gentlemen," said Haverbeck, coolly, "I daresay your part in this business is as disagreeable as my own. Shall we not then bring it to a prompt conclusion?"

"It is to be swift and secret," muttered the gaoler, sombrely, "all depends on your behaviour, sir, no matter how it be done, if it be done quickly and privately."

Haverbeck did not answer. He was now absolutely convinced that this was the work of Madame Rocklitz. No man could have contrived so vile and so atrocious an end for a soldier. His eyes narrowed as he considered those filthy blood-stained hands of the men from the torture chamber touching him—hands that had but that very day been wrenching a woman's joints apart: two of them held coils of rope: they waited, sullen, avoiding his eye.

"She could not have realized it," Haverbeck thought, trying to excuse her in his mind.

He asked:

"How is this murder intended? Am I to be despatched here?"

He had himself completely under control even now though he faced far worse than death, and there was a grisly admiration and

a mute applause in the grey gaoler's look, and the four ruffians shuffled and grimaced uneasily.

"The governor of the Koenigsberg," muttered the gaoler, "is under his orders, as you, sir, being a soldier will understand—and these are very positive. But he has done what he could. And maybe at cost to himself. Yet it seemed to him that you being a brave honourable gentleman—and a woman at the bottom of it—"

"Leave that," interrupted Haverbeck, grimly.

"Well, sir, I was to tell you that—a woman in it—ordering it—designing it, you understand."

So she wished him to know that he died at her command; Haverbeck was consumed with pity, thinking of the remorse of Madelon; but there was no longer any time in which to think of Madelon.

"It seems," he said sternly to the gaoler, "that you are the umpire of my fate—a task which weighs on you, as I think you seem uneasy. Unburden yourself. I would be gone from this company."

"The governor of the Koenigsberg," muttered the overawed gaoler, "bade me tell you that he was stretching his powers as far as this—I am to give you, sir, five minutes alone—there is the surgeon outside who will be in immediate attendance. And I am to return you this, sir, which was taken from you the night of your arrest." He brought out of his pocket the Saracen dagger, that Haverbeck had picked up after the Turkish rout, and laid it on the table.

Haverbeck's soul leaped to meet his fate.

"Why this is easy—it is but to open an old wound."

TWENTY-THREE

Francoise de Rosny crouched in a small cell in the Koenigsberg, and her bandaged fingers painfully traced her signature to a long written paper; as she did so a few drops of blood were squeezed from underneath the bandage and fell on to the document. She wore a straight shapeless robe of a harsh grey material; her hair had been roughly cut to the nape of her neck; her features were yellowed and furrowed, her face glistened with a horrid damp.

The examining judges peering at her signature in the harsh light of the high set lamp decided that it was illegible, and she was forced, though the effort cost her agonizing pain, to trace with her mutilated hand her name again; then she was allowed to sink back on the blood-stained mattress from which she had been lifted and given a meat soup with two eggs in it, to revive her strength for further rackings and screwings should they be considered necessary.

The judges putting their heads close together and standing directly underneath the lamp braced by iron stanchions to the wall read the confession with eager yet terrified gaze.

In this Françoise de Rosny had admitted having been a governess in the house of Rudolph von Neitschütz, now Field Marshal of the Saxon Army, and that she had, together with him and his two sons, practised witchcraft, spells and incantations, the object of which was to delude the Electoral Prince, now his Highness Johann Georg IV, Elector of Saxony, Arch Marshal of the Empire, into a marriage with Magdalena Sibylla von Neitschütz, now the Countess Rocklitz. She admitted that she had early sold and sealed the soul of the young girl to the devil; that they had on Walpurgis-night often enough attended the orgies and debauches of the fiends, that the Elector, even as a

young boy, had been amused and abused with drinks and potions, the object of which was to attract him violently to Magdalena Sibylla, and that when these machinations were defeated by the efforts of Count Ferdinand Stürm in marrying his Highness to the present Electress, still they had contrived to get the young man by their devilish wiles into their clutches again, and foist Magdalena Sibylla on him as his mistress. She, Madame Rocklitz, the confession read, had confessed to her, Françoise de Rosny, that she had, the very first night the Elector had possession of her, given him a drug which bemused his senses. She had poured it out of a small green bottle into a small green glass which she kept among the ornaments on her toilet table. She had, ever since then, obtained dominion of him by the same means. She had frequently visited Madame de Rosny and received from her potions and philtres by which she was to maintain her hold on the Elector's affections. Further, Françoise de Rosny confessed, the night before her own arrest that Madame Rocklitz had visited her in the guise of a young man in a plain travelling dress, and that with the greatest emotion and excitement she had demanded from her three separate concoctions—one, a philtre to awaken love; one, a potion to bring sleep; and the third, a swift poison.

These, Françoise de Rosny, being entirely in the power of the devil and sealed against all conscience, had given to her, and in return had received a golden egg of peculiar workmanship as earnest, and later a string of diamonds, which Madame Rocklitz had taken from the green vaults, of which the Elector, in his infatuation, had often given her the keys; both these objects she had surrendered when arrested.

Madame de Rosny further deposed that the Countess Rocklitz, her father and brothers, also being aided and inspired by the devil, were in several schemes to declare the present marriage of the Elector null and void, and to trump up some show of the Countess Rocklitz being his wife by the left-hand, or precontracted to him. That there were schemes to put aside her present Highness the Electress and give the Countess Rocklitz

the station of a wife; it was true that a spell had been put on his Highness so that he could have no children by any woman save the Countess Rocklitz; that was the meaning of the dead child in the tree at Flöha.

Françoise de Rosny further believed that there was some league or pact with the devil to keep the Countess Rocklitz barren till she could call herself a wife and to obtain the crown of Poland, so that the Countess Rocklitz should at last die crowned a queen.

"She can say no more," murmured one of the judges, overawed and horrified by this terrible document.

"And it agrees with what the other witch said," whispered another, shaking his grey head, glancing with dread at the awful figure on the straw mattress; he thought he saw the shape of the devil behind her.

"Word for word it is the same matter and the same accusation, that is, to a point, for the other woman, the Baroness von Ilten, did not know so much about the House of Neitschütz, she was never in residence with them, nor so deep in their secrets."

"Besides," said the first judge, "she died before we could get any coherent statement from her. She took no more than four turns at the question."

All three turned and stared with a profound disgust and a frightful curiosity at the miserable creature who had now not much likeness to humanity, who lay and shuddered, and moaned and chattered on the straw mattress, and endeavoured to drink some spoonfuls of the meat soup, and who now and then, in broken and unnatural tones, begged that she might be sent straight to the stake, sooner than again to the torture-chamber.

"It's enough for tonight," whispered one of the judges, holding tightly, yet far from him, the terrible paper lest it contaminated his person. "Let her be till the morning, take her to her cell, and let the surgeon see her. This has been a hideous day's work."

He wiped the sweat from his viscid brow.

One of his colleagues, however, a younger and more ambitious man, was anxious lest they had let fly some opportunity of

gathering evidence against the Rocklitz; Stürm, who had given them careful instructions, had been insistent on that point; the sole object of the arrest and torture of the two women was to ruin the Elector's mistress; and surely it was a fine service to God and the State to rid His Highness of this rapacious, shameless woman and her insolent relatives and creatures who stopped the sources of honour and favour, and who, as this confession showed, even dealt in magic and poison?

"See," said this earnest judge, "we have omitted the name of the man for whom the Rocklitz bought the love potion."

"That touches politics, eh? It was that of the Marshal de Haverbeck—best leave it out. He is not in the Elector's good graces."

"Nay, but should we not put it in—out of fairness to the gentleman? A woman does not buy a love potion for a willing gallant."

"Leave it—I have not heard that he is suspected.—Eh, this is a paper to put before the Elector!"

"We shall have the Rocklitz herself here tomorrow night."

"Will he part with her so easily? She has him bemused."

"Ay, from that first night."

The speaker turned to Françoise de Rosny crouching on the mattress.

"How do you know the Rocklitz bewitched his Highness with a draught in a green bottle the first night he had her person?"

"She told me," whispered the prisoner. "Said he had mentioned it to her and she was frightened—said she wished he had not seen it—"

"Ah! Who thought of the devilish scheme of making the Electress barren?"

"Madelon Rocklitz."

"Why?"

"So that her husband might conceive a disgust for her—it was intended to make away with her presently."

"Who would do that murder?"

"Madelon Rocklitz."

The three judges glanced at each other.

"She then intended to marry the Elector?"

"Yes. And bring him over to the Papists and get the Crown of Poland."

"Why did she not have a child herself—it was known to be the open desire of the Elector—the answer here is not satisfactory, why should she wait till she was his wife, she so shameless and he so passionate to have a child by her—a son would have been a sharp, keen hold on him."

The prisoner stirred her mangled limbs and grinned up from the straw.

"Have you not got enough evidence against Madelon Rocklitz?" she sneered.

"It will need all we can get to combat the gross infatuation of his Highness," replied one of the judges grimly. "We have to rescue the honour and safety of the House of Wettin from your accursed plots."

"I've said enough to send her to the stake," snarled the malignant woman, groaning as she moved. "Let her burn for me. She brought me here—why could she not leave me alone! Let her burn! burn! burn!"

Her voice ended on a shriek and she mouthed at her judges.

"Belike there is not enough here to burn her," objected the earnest young judge. "Tell us more, if you know it, the Elector is deep in her power."

"I'll tell you something will spoil his appetite for her," chattered the prisoner, "something will bring the whole damned family where I am now—Madelon Rocklitz did not dare to have a child lest it should have a fiend's face—for she has had carnal knowledge of a demon since she was twelve years old."

Calling on the name of God, the three judges stepped back and the old woman gave a terrible laugh.

"Is that enough for you? I've seen him in her chamber at Arnsdorf—she used to recite spells to bring him—men and

devils were one to her, a lustful wanton, even as a child. Now will her besotted fool turn her out of keeping?"

"This must be another deposition and signature," whispered one of the judges, much shaken, "have it engrossed." He turned to the barber surgeon now kneeling beside the prisoner—"Will she live till morning?"

"Yes, sir, her pulse is strong. She has got much vigour."

"Take her away. We will see her in the morning."

The three judges left the narrow room (which was an antechamber to the torture-chamber) whispering fearfully among themselves.

Françoise de Rosny was helped to her feet by the two gaolers and escorted from the chamber into a long corridor lit by a smoky and tawny light from two small high-placed lamps; though neither her knees nor her ankles had been disjointed the barber surgeon declared it was impossible for her to walk and the two men who were used to this work had to drag her along the corridor by locking their arms behind her back and allowing her bandaged hands to hang over their shoulders.

The bitter progress down the murky corridor, which was marked with drops of blood on the flagstones, and accompanied with groans from the tormented woman, was passed by another sinister cortége, four men who came slowly, carrying some heavy object on a rude bier, over which was thrown a common blanket.

Françoise de Rosny knew it at once for a dead and murdered man, and shrieked; she saw a fine hand with ruffles and a braided cuff hanging out at the side, under the coverlet she saw a cluster of dark hair appearing at the top; as the bier was carried past, one of the men supporting her, with a callous curiosity, twitched the blanket aside, and Françoise de Rosny looked down on to a face that was very familiar to her indeed—a face that had once smiled on her, that had turned on her a kindly and friendly look, that she had known as a child's face, glowing and beautiful, that she had known as a youth's face, gazing at her curiously and with contempt, that she had known as a man's

face, brave and resolute, that she had seen not very long ago—why, seen a day or so ago when she stood shivering in the snow at the street corner and had watched him riding by on a bay horse, and the people shouting for him. . . . She lifted her dry, cracked lips; she began to laugh:

"Well, it isn't only the devil who brings one down," she whispered. "What's the difference between us now, eh? For all his virtue!"

The four men passed down the corridor with their heavy burden. Françoise de Rosny, sagging between the gaoler's arms, continued her agonized progress to her cell.

"I'm not the first, nor the last," she gibbered to herself, in an imbecile fashion. "The devil will get us all, one at a time. How many left already of that happy household at Arnsdorf?" She chattered to herself, thinking of the fate of Madelon, of her brothers and her father. Well, it was a pity that she couldn't have lived to see that; they needn't have tortured her so sharply to get *that* confession out of her—if they had given her time she would have told them all they wanted to know about the House of Neitschütz, and not have damned herself to the stake—she hoped she had said enough now; she hoped they'd know who had got level with them at last.

About this hour, while four men walking heavily were carrying a dead man between them along the corridors of the Koenigsberg, the Elector broke into the apartments of Ferdinand Stürm in the Residenzschloss, clutched the minister's frail shoulders like a creature crazed, and demanded his instant help.

A secret exultation in finding himself again indispensable to his master touched the cold blood of Ferdinand Stürm. He endeavoured to soothe the young man who looked wild enough, and was struggling, the minister did not doubt, between his passion for Madame Rocklitz and the revelations he had lately heard concerning that lady and her family.

"And it will be worse tomorrow," thought Stürm, coolly, "when he reads the confession of the witch, that, as I believe, is damning enough."

The Elector remained standing by the table where the monkey played, and fixed on Stürm a glare of horror. He had pushed his bright hair back from his forehead, and his face had lost all its colour—greenish and blotched, it showed, as if marked by fingers.

"I've had him murdered," he said. "It will be over by now."

"Murdered!" whispered Stürm, alert and sharp.

"Marshal de Haverbeck," replied the Elector, with a strong shudder.

"Oh, God!" Ferdinand Stürm put his fingers to his chin. "In the Koenigsberg—you had him secretly despatched there?"

"Tonight. It would not be," murmured the Elector, "more than half an hour or so ago. I—I commanded the governor. I realized, suddenly, you know, that I had that power of death. I sent a clergyman to him, then the four executioners, and he was not armed."

"A death like that," stammered Stürm, overawed for the first time in his life, "for a man like Haverbeck."

"It was intolerable," gasped the Elector. "The wrong he did me was intolerable, too. He was so cool. I went to see him, and I could not move him at all. He would not say what there was between them that night."

"You went to ask him?" demanded Stürm, bewildered.

"I thought I might find out," muttered the Elector. "But, you could see—anyone could see that he was in every way a better man than I'll ever be. To look at, to speak to—successful. . . . I shall never be a good soldier—I have not been trained. Madelon must prefer a man like that. So I thought, as I went away defeated, I had the power to end it all—and I did. He's dead. I could not endure that he should like—to laugh at me with her."

"This," exclaimed Stürm, "is a damnable horror, and the last thing that I intended. Haverbeck was to have been released tomorrow. He was arrested merely to make it impossible for him to deny that he had passed the night in Madame Rocklitz's house. I intended to see what Madame de Rosny knew and

confront him with it; but this . . . Your Highness has overthrown everything."

"He's dead," said the Elector. "He's dead. A prince can do these deeds; it is not murder for a prince. I did not do it myself —I gave the order; I went to see the governor myself, I remembered that I was a prince. It is not murder if you are a prince— I am above the law, you told me so."

"What shall we tell the Emperor—Sir William Colt, and Spanheim?"

"I don't know," replied the Elector, vaguely. "I came to you because of that. What's to be done? No one must know. I could not endure that they should know. They'll say, a gentleman would not have done it, eh?"

Stürm looked at him with the indifference of a complete disdain.

"Why, I must manage this, as I suppose," he said in extreme distress. "I'll go down at once to the Koenigsberg; I'll see what can be done. I have had a difficulty in keeping the gentleman's servants quiet—they believe he left suddenly last night on some intrigue—and that's not lightly believed of Haverbeck, or that he visited his estates suddenly, and that's an incivility that goes down ill, too, with a man like him. His friends were waiting for him last night—this is a damnable coil."

"Listen," sobbed the Elector, taking no heed of all this. He put out his unsteady hand and clutched Count Stürm's cuff. "There's worse than anything I've told you—"

"Worse! How could there be anything worse than murder?" cried Stürm, bitterly.

"There's this. He thought she commanded it. I let him think that. I told him that she had betrayed him to me; of course she does not even know that he was in prison, she, too, thinks that he has gone to his estates—"

"That's diabolical," exclaimed Stürm, shaking off his master's hand. "What did you do that for? And she, whatever she is— is incapable of that—"

"I do not know—it came to me to do it—I hated him so. I've

always hated him, and I thought nothing could sting him like that—thinking *she* had ordered it—I told them to tell the man who went—to—to do it—to—to find some way of saying that it was her work—"

Stürm was bewildered; he thought he had been so quick and shrewd, and got so clearly to the bottom of all this, and yet there was a great deal he had missed, or not understood. Why should Haverbeck imagine the Rocklitz had contrived this arrest and death? Stürm had thought them lovers; he had thought she went to get a drug to quieten the Elector, he did not yet (for he had not read Françoise de Rosny's confession) know of that other pitiful purchase; Stürm bitterly blamed himself; he, so sure of his touch, so delicate and careful in his methods, had bungled horribly.

"What made you imagine," he asked, "that Haverbeck could believe she had done it—what would her motive have been? Did you not suppose her his mistress? It is all lunatic to me."

"It is lunatic enough," replied the Elector, with a ghastly look. "Of course he did not believe it—of course she was his mistress, she was with him in her house, while I was drugged here—but I tried to make him think she had betrayed him, that was the only salve I could get—I hardly knew what I said—I wanted to make him think she laughed at him."

"He never credited it," said Stürm, not guessing what good cause Haverbeck had had to credit the random, frantic, foolish lie. "But it was a fearful thing to say—and out of character, she is a light, but not a cruel woman—"

"I wanted to ask him about the child," interrupted Johann Georg, "but could not—she visits it, you said? It is hers you think?"

"No, on my soul I do not," replied Stürm bitterly. "I am sorry I led you so far on that way—she is too young—and I believe was innocent till you had her, sir. She visits the child from womanish sentiment—the mother was Carlotta Drexel, buried in the Marienkirche on the Bächnitz road."

"You never told me this before," stammered the Elector, "and

it was—was because of that I ordered him to be—killed. You see—he and Madelon—who could have endured it? Because of the child—I have none, bastard or heir. I would have killed the child, too, easily—then."

Stürm cursed himself; how stupid a mistake he had made in judging this boy by his own cold standards; what folly not to have remembered the havoc and misery the hot blood of youth will cause! He had endeavoured to inflame the jealousy of Johann Georg to ruin the Rocklitz and defeat the alliance with the Empire; he had intended to sweep away the House of Neitschütz and bring Saxony back to the French interest, thereby securing his own fortunes—and fool that he was, he had never guessed what intractable passions he was inflaming and loosing—and the end was murder; Stürm felt sick and shaken; he had always liked Haverbeck.

He stared with angry disgust at the blotched, distorted face of the Prince, who gazed at him so stupidly and desperately.

"Leave me out of this," he said roughly, turning away. "I can't go any further into these devilish lies. Your Highness has turned about in your character. . . ."

"The poisons she gave me!" cried the Elector, with a sudden shriek in his voice—"I had not done it if I had been in my senses—I'm only returning to my senses now. I haven't known all day what I've been doing. What was it she gave me? It was witchcraft. It was some devil's brew."

"It was, as I take it, some concoction of opium, or mess of laudanum—there's no witchcraft in any of this—but a subtle knowledge of drugs."

The Elector shook his head.

"I know I'm bewitched, my sight's gone—I can't see. You have got all these candles alight—but I can just see them like pinpoints; the light in the room is all vague to me. The stove gives out no heat. I'm nearly blind! Half blind! Cold! I'd never have done it in my senses."

Ferdinand Stürm looked at him drily; it was clear enough

that the young man's courage and control were shattered, but whether this was by witchcraft, or drug, or passion mattered but little to Stürm. He saw his whole country embroiled by an ugly and wanton crime, and he knew he would have to bring all his wits to bear upon the situation to extricate himself and Saxony from this difficult, shameful position. Having now regained some of his usual composure—for, indeed, at first he had been considerably shocked and stunned by the Elector's confession—he began to speak in his usual formal tones, hoping thereby to restore the youth to some measure of dignity and restraint.

"Your Highness has ordered this deed and, as I take it, your orders have been carried out. If you will but maintain your self-command, it may be that it can be hushed up and carried off yet." Then he brought himself to ask, though with a sick look and a faltering accent:

"How—how was it done?"

"I don't know," whimpered the Elector. Then, with a glare, "I suppose they strangled him."

"Then I can do nothing," exclaimed Stürm, in tones of disgust. "You set four men on him, and, I suppose, he fought for his life. . . ."

The shuddering Elector cried out:

"Will Christ forgive me? Will God forgive me?"

Stürm could not forbear a bitter sneer.

"Are these things crimes to a prince? Your Highness has just excused himself on that score."

The Elector was turning to him again, catching at his cuff:

"Would they refuse me absolution, too? Would they put me outside the Church if they knew?"

Ferdinand Stürm's patience, deference and control vanished before his anger: he shook off the heavy, distracted young man, and cried, fearfully, in a low tone:

"You doltish, whining, besotted boy, let me go! All our honours are on this."

The Elector, without resentment, turned miserably away.

"Where's Madelon?" he asked, "where's Madelon Rocklitz?"

"Ay," said Stürm, snatching and buttoning up his mantle, "you had best go to Madame Rocklitz!"

He left the Residenzschloss quickly and quietly, confronting, with an admirable coolness and courage which had never yet failed him in many an emergency, a vast menace to his own fortunes and those of Saxony.

He had his careful emissaries and in his own house he interviewed several of these brought on the sudden summons. Arrangements were made, swiftly, adroitly; messages were sent to the Marshal de Haverbeck's lodgings, to his gentlemen and servants; then, having put these affairs swiftly in readiness, Stürm went directly to the Koenigsberg. Though it was the middle of the night he was admitted at once to the presence of the governor, who, a bowed and uneasy man, was sitting over the stove, drinking; he appeared neither to have slept nor to be thinking of sleep that night.

"Haverbeck," said the minister abruptly, "has been murdered here tonight."

The governor swore a quick oath.

"If the Elector had not come to me in person I would never have done it. He was resolute. I have his warrant for it."

"There is no blame on you," replied Stürm, grimly, "but it is a thing that touches us all close, and I have done my best to put some face on it—you have, as you say, your warrant and your signed order. The Elector was half-insane, you might have noticed that, and held your hand. But I have not come to reproach you. Where is Haverbeck?"

"In the chapel," replied the governor, then began, in a hurried manner, to excuse himself from the deed and its consequences.

Stürm cut him short.

"I have absolutely no time to listen to you, my dear Governor, in the morning, perhaps; there are other measures that are imperative. How did Marshal de Haverbeck die?"

The governor looked profoundly uneasy, and replied:

"The Elector's commands were that he should be despatched

after he had had half an hour with a pastor; I sent him a clergyman on whom I can rely—a simple fellow, but one loyal, and I made him take an oath of secrecy. It seemed a foul thing not to allow him to send any messages or write some letters. But these were the Elector's positive commands—no one but the pastor and half an hour; and then four assistants from the torture chamber to despatch him."

"Despatch him—how?" demanded Stürm, turning away and shivering over the stove.

"Well, that was it—it's not so easy, you know; even if a man is unarmed, and a gentleman of his rank, and a valiant soldier—it went hard with me, Count Stürm. But, as I say, if it hadn't been the Elector's own commands, from his own lips—"

"I heard that," interrupted Stürm, in heavy impatience; "tell me how this unfortunate gentleman was finally slain."

The governor rose and began to walk up and down the room, a heavy and a troubled man.

"Upon my honour I believe the Elector meant he was to be strangled; but you know what that means, and, as I say—a man like Haverbeck—and that cursed woman at the bottom of it all, as I suppose . . ."

"Leave her," said Stürm, impatiently, "she's damned enough without our curses."

"His sword had been taken from him," continued the governor in a low troubled voice. "He had besides a small dagger—a curious thing, something I believe he had gotten in the Turkish war. And I—I took it upon myself to wrap this in a handkerchief. I gave it to the gaoler and sent him down with the four men. I told him to give it to Marshal de Haverbeck, and keep the men back until he had used it. To give him five minutes alone. You understand?"

"I understand," said Stürm, with considerable relief, "and that was how it was done?"

"Yes—I did not disobey the Elector—the men were there if he had refused—or resisted. But he was very grateful—he said it was but to open an old wound. You know he had two balls in

the breast in Hungary—when they returned he was at the table —he lived about twenty minutes; the surgeon told me that he was so healthy and so constant in his mind that he might have been saved had it been permitted to staunch the wound—he swooned several times, but recovered, as if he made a struggle for it—he thanked them all for their good offices, sent his watch to me and asked me to give one of his rings to the gaoler, and God!" broke out the coarse soldier, passionately, "I would your Elector had hanged himself before he put this work on me."

"There's a better man gone," said Stürm, "than ever you or I are likely to serve under, my dear Governor—for his honour and ours let us consider how to cover the matter over. I have given out to his people," continued the minister unsteadily, for his voice had been moved and his eyes moist, "that he has been called to the Koenigsberg to take part in the examination of some prisoner —they will ask no more than that, knowing his mission to be vital and probably secret. He is supposed to have taken his leave of the Elector and to have seen his estates, and to be returning immediately to Vienna. His coach will be here in half an hour; and you and I, my dear Governor, must escort him into it. Captain Falaiseau, who is a man I can trust, will be his companion—his escort, as it were, to the frontier—Spandau. I have seen Marshal de Haverbeck's doctor whom he had with him in his company. These people can all be bought or frightened. This doctor will testify that the Marshal will die on his journey of a sudden fit or seizure, following the breaking out of his old wound; he will also see that the body is properly embalmed at the first opportunity, and then, though one cannot stop comment, or gossip, or rumour—we shall have evaded an absolute open scandal."

"Do you think that he would have wished that himself?" asked the governor, frowning.

"I think he would," replied Stürm, earnestly. "He was a very honourable and a very generous man, and I think he would have wished this himself—it was never his pleasure to embroil anyone. And it's impossible for me to forgive myself."

Under a full moon shining from the very zenith of the cold heavens, a coach rapidly left Dresden and rolled over the great post-road towards the frontier. The arms of Lüneburg-Haverbeck were on the side panels and the footmen and the outriders wore the Imperial livery. It was escorted by a company of Saxon Life Guards, the commander of these, Captain Falaiseau, rode as a mark of respect close to the window of the Imperial Ambassador's carriage. Sometimes this soldier called a halt, and, lifting the leathern curtain of the coach, appeared to hold a conversation with the occupant, asking if he would halt at Spandau, or if he would stop for refreshment at one of the several inns and such like ordinary courtesies of the way. And each time he reported to the officers who rode nearest him that Marshal de Haverbeck was all for pressing onwards. The doctor entered the coach during these halts, for he had given out that the Envoy was troubled with a heaviness of the spirits, an oppression of the heart.

"I believe," remarked Falaiseau, with an air of one who has some secret knowledge, or wishes it to be assumed that he has, "I believe," said Captain Falaiseau, jovially, "that there is something behind this quick travelling away from Dresden in the middle of the night, this hastening back to Vienna—perhaps the Alliance is not so sure, as we all thought, eh?"

So he laughed and whispered with his companions, as the coach, with the four horses, the outriders, and the escort of soldiers went swiftly along the great post-road under the high moon —towards Vienna.

The cavalcade reached the frontiers the station of Tetschen in the second hour of dawn as a cold, colourless April day broke about the quiet landscape.

Captain Falaiseau had all the necessary papers for the soldiers who came out from the lonely post-house to challenge as a matter of form the travellers.

"I would not disturb His Excellency, I believe he is asleep," he remarked, peering over the collar of his mantle.

The officer in charge of the frontier station was not satisfied

with that, he meant to do his duty and not be overawed by Falaiseau; he had, too, a certain desire to see the Marshal de Haverbeck whose laurels had burnished so brightly lately, and whose renown was a glory to his native Saxony. Therefore, with a lantern in his hand, for the daylight was yet uncertain, he went to the coach door and bade a groom open it, and looked inside respectfully and eagerly. It appeared to be true what Captain Falaiseau had said, that the Marshal, exhausted no doubt by the strenuous business he had undertaken in Dresden and travelling thus throughout the night, had fallen asleep. In admiration and curiosity the young officer peered at the Imperial envoy. He was propped on a travelling cushion in a corner of the coach, his dark fur mantle was wrapped close up to his chin, so that his throat and bosom and indeed his whole person were completely covered, only a thin white line showed where his muslin cravat separated his face from his cloak. One of his hands lay on the seat, covered by a fringed glove; his sword, a pair of pistols and a small dagger with a Turkish-shaped handle of jade and rubies also lay along the seat not far from his outstretched gloved hand. He wore a broad-leafed hat pulled well over his face. The officer could perceive the dark slanting eyebrows, the heavy fringe of his black lashes. The eyes were closed. His complexion was of an unhealthy tinge, and his lips strained and colourless; oddly there were a box of sponges on the floor and some folded napkins—a surgeon's equipment.

"Do not disturb him," commanded Falaiseau, sternly gazing over the young man's shoulder.

Uneasily the officer replied.

"His Excellency does not look very well, yet he sleeps heavily."

"He has not," replied Falaiseau, grimly, "been very well of late, he has his doctor in close attendance. Those old wounds in his breast, you know, have been troubling him of late."

"I should like to have spoken with him," thought the young officer, regretfully, "and him to have spoken to me." He held the lantern higher and looked with a lingering curiosity at that majestic figure, asleep in the corner of the coach, and thought

that he could believe all that he had heard of this gentleman (who was so young and so successful)—his courage, his fine leadership, his magnanimity, his good humour; for this quiet face, pale and serene, seemed to have a peculiar kind of nobility and to be one that he would willingly have owned as the countenance of a friend or master.

Captain Falaiseau tapped him on the shoulder, and the officer thought, looking up, that his countenance, too, appeared haggard and seemed greenish in this uncertain light of the chill dawn.

"We must get on our way," said Falaiseau, "do not disturb the Marshal. He has been, I believe, many nights awake, and I daresay," he added, with a grim look, "he will be many nights asleep. I take him another half league, then return."

The officer saluted. He had given a formal and careless glance at the papers. The barriers were lifted up, the gates set apart, and the coach with its retinue of outriders, the escort of Saxon soldiers, took the post-road towards Vienna.

The officer and the little group of soldiers, slapping their hands and their thighs in the keen air, watched this cortège disappear along the grey wide road, between the bare vineyards, and the trees whose empty boughs were interlaced darkly against the paling sky.

"A queer hour for a great gentleman to travel," the officer thought; he felt a chill and a depression in the air, a bleakness in the prospect and a blankness in the sky, that he had never before observed—not even on many days of deep winter more menacing and cold than this. He turned into the lonely station and into the guard-room, and urged his servant to be quick about the making of coffee. He warmed his hands over the stove and frowned at the recollection of the haggard face of Falaiseau, and that other face of Marshal de Haverbeck, sleeping so serenely in his darkened coach, being driven so swiftly towards Vienna—with such an unnatural hurry at so sinister an hour.

TWENTY-FOUR

Marshal von Neitschutz did not like the appearance affairs wore at the Residenzschloss, for many days he had not liked the look of Count Stürm, and now that minister was inaccessible; by no subterfuge or guile could he be induced to give an interview to the Chief of the Army. Colt and Spanheim seemed embarrassed and confused, even anxious. The Alliance was signed, but what would it be worth? It was Stürm and Rebénéc, the minister and the French envoy, who had the air of triumph which should have belonged to their rivals; and ugly rumours had reached the ears of Neitschütz. He had heard that there was a warrant out for Françoise de Rosny. This seemed absurd; no one would dare—a word to the Elector would be sufficient to set her at liberty. But it was only a rumour, he could not discover if there were any foundation for it, though he sent secret messengers down to that blank house in that ill-famed street, he got no satisfaction save that the two ladies were away in the country, and might any moment return. He began to find that Count Stürm's power and influence and cleverness were all far greater than his own, and that six months' domination in Dresden had not taught him all the divers secrets and complicated ways that were known only to Stürm—the minister who had been for nearly thirty years in office. On every hand he was baffled; he could get no news of anything. Some said that the women had certainly been taken to the Koenigsberg, yet there was no confirmation of this—nothing on which he could act. And then this disappearance of Haverbeck; surely an extraordinary thing for an Imperial envoy to leave so abruptly, to rattle out of Dresden in the middle of the night, escorted by the Life Guards. And by whose orders? Stürm must have acted there without consulting him! He could get no word with

Stürm to ask his reason. Who was this Falaiseau? He had looked up his antecedents and found he was a man whose family were under the greatest obligations to Stürm; he himself had been given his position by the minister when he was a refugee from France. Neitschütz did not like any of it. He did not care for his daughter's distracted look, nor that illness of the Elector the night before. There seemed a trembling hope, a bright expectancy about the Electress, when he chanced to pass her on the stairs of the Residenzschloss. He summoned his eldest son, Clement—the Chamberlain could not be found, he was neither in the palace nor his residence. Has he, thought his wretched father, got wind of some misfortune and fled, without warning me or caring? It would be like Clement, and Neitschütz could believe this without difficulty.

Casimir, easily at hand, knew nothing. He replied to his father's horrid doubts with imprecations. He was absolutely confident of Madelon and her hold on the Elector; he flouted all idea that Madame de Rosny might be arrested and thrust into the Koenigsberg, and if she had been what could she say—and whatever she said, who would listen?

"We could never," remarked Marshal von Neitschütz, grimly, "face a charge of witchcraft. The last three days, Casimir, have been hellish. There's some devil's mischief brewing. Where's Haverbeck gone? And Stürm creeping about with a smile, and Rebénéc's triumph, and our two friends—Colt and Spanheim—are bewildered—ill at ease."

"They've paid, haven't they?" asked Casimir, coarsely. "You've pocketed the money and Madelon's got her pension assured to her; the Elector's going to put his army into the field in the spring. Well, then, what more is there?"

"That is what I should like to know," said Marshal von Neitschütz, "what more is there afoot? I have tried to find out but I'm baffled at every turn. Stürm's a slyer fiend than ever you and I counted on, Casimir."

"We should have had *him* in the Koenigsberg," replied Casimir, with an oath, "and must yet."

"Stay with me today," asked his father sombrely, "I may need your help."

Casimir was bound on a party of pleasure with some of his flatterers on an estate which he had recently bought and which he had furnished with every ostentation of extravagance, and rudely refused to listen to his father's stern pleading.

"Where's Clement?" demanded the wretched old man, after cursing his younger son for his feather-headed folly.

"How am I to know where Clement is? Looking after his own interests, you may be sure," sneered Casimir, adjusting his curls in a mirror he kept in his muff. "Why don't you go to Madelon?—Madelon knows everything, she is much cleverer than I am."

His father stared at him with loathing. He then took him roughly by the shoulder and thrust him out of his room. He followed, however, his sneering advice, and went in search of his daughter. She was not in her apartments in the Residenz-schloss but had retired to her own house again. The Elector was enclosed with one of the court divines. It was said that he had passed a frightful night, without repose, in a kind of delirium, and now had fallen into a sullen sleep. Count Stürm had visited him in the early morning and had been admitted, but he would see no one else—no, not even Marshal von Neitschütz.

As the old man went heavily to his daughter's house, he met one of the disreputable friends of his elder son—a man he had always detested, who seemed now to take some malicious pleasure in stopping him and telling him that Clement was already out of Dresden—by now over the frontier.

"He doesn't like some things he has heard—do you see? He thought perhaps it would be safer in Hanover than in Saxony. Perhaps you will understand, Marshal? Clement had always a cool head, and quick fingers, too. He has filled his pockets and his trunks and taken all the bills he could find—"

"Why are you telling me this?" interrupted Marshal von Neitschütz, hoarsely; and it occurred to him that the fellow was speaking to him as if to a fallen and powerless man.

"I thought it might amuse you—it's all news of the day, is it not? Perhaps more diverting than what you will see in the *Gazette*."

The gentleman had stuck his fat unwholesome-looking face out of the sedan to give this information and was now carried on his way, whistling.

The Marshal stood stone-still in the streets of Dresden, with his hand to his side.

Clement away! Clement over the frontier! Clement, who was always the coolest and most selfish, he who kept his head, and nosed about and found out things. What had Clement discovered to send him over the frontier? What did that odious man know, with his grinning waxy face, and his flaccid lips twisted into a sneer? Marshal von Neitschütz hurried to his daughter's house. She was in her room and seemed calmer than yesterday, though surprised and something perturbed at his entrance. She said that she had not seen the Elector since yesterday, and early in the day, before his interview with Count Stürm. She had sent a message to enquire after his health and heard that he was well enough, yet that he had had a disturbed night.

"It is not what I have heard," said Marshal von Neitschütz, biting his forefinger, savagely. "There are many things happening that I don't care about at all, my girl; I'm hearing a great deal I don't care to hear; I can't say that I can put my finger on anything yet, but—"

"What are you afraid of?" asked Madelon.

"I'm afraid of that woman Rosny; and if they arrest her and make her say things—I've always been afraid of that. It was a deucedly confounded chance that sent her across our path and then sent her across that Ilten's path."

"I don't know what you mean," said Madelon, carefully. "Even if Madame de Rosny were, as you say, arrested—and what should she be arrested for?"

"Witchcraft!" cried Marshal von Neitschütz, with a snarl. "Witchcraft—I've always been afraid of that. Do you remem-

ber years ago how I warned you? Do you remember six months ago how I warned you? You always showed a sympathy with these cantrips of the devil. The Elector," he added, with black gloom, "is very superstitious, the doltish, miserable fool."

Madelon felt invisible terrors gathering round her, yet she was not really afraid. All power, after all, centred in Johann Georg —with Johann Georg she was secure.

"This departure of Haverbeck, now," demanded Neitschütz, "have you any hand in that?"

Here Madelon smiled.

She believed that he had gone because of her, to avoid any further encounter—it was a proof of her power that he had had to leave Dresden. Her smile was sweet. Her beauteous bloom glowed with possible chances of happiness—they were both so young. "I might follow the army in Hungary. I might go to the court at Vienna, in any fantastic guise. I might find a dozen ways of seeing him again."

"Oh, my father, be at ease," she cried, with an airiness almost of gaiety in her tones. "I do not like to behold you so distressed. Madame de Rosny and her friends, as I do believe, have gone to her estates in the country—that is what I was told."

"Then," exclaimed her father, turning on her, "you are in touch with her?"

Madelon was startled by his ferocious alarm:

"I have, as you know, visited her; she is our ancient governess —no more, there is nothing wrong."

"You've never had anything from her?" asked her father, with tense eagerness. "Never talked to her of spells and such like trumpery—any trash of potions or amulets?"

"No," replied the Rocklitz, swiftly lying, as she had so often lied of late. "None of that, nothing ever. Just some ancient kindness because of old days."

"There was no need of that," grumbled Marshal von Neitschütz. He was relieved, however, by his daughter's assertions. "She has a foul reputation."

"Yes," said Madelon, in still tones, "and she taught me."

"I did not know this of her then," he retorted, in some confusion. "I took her for a decent gentlewoman—what did I know?"

His lying excuses died on his withered lips as he saw his daughter's light brown eyes fixed on him with a steady look of understanding.

"I don't know why you sulk here," he muttered in a black confusion; "why don't you get to the Residenzschloss and chase the Electress out of her husband's room?"

"I'll go," said Madelon, "I'll go."

She was not alarmed by this talk of the Elector's illness; she believed he was but feeling the effect of the drug—evidently Madame de Rosny had made it too strong.

"But why are you so uneasy, my father? He is all mine—the Elector is all mine from the moment I see him."

She did not dare tell her father of the suspicions that Johann Georg had flung at her, nor did she greatly regard them herself, although they had given her a momentary damp of horror; after all, he had been—as she said—all hers again—a willing, enchanted captive in her arms.

"Why do I look uneasy?" scowled Marshal von Neitschütz, "do you know that Clement has gone?"

"Clement gone! Where?"

"Across the frontier into Hanover."

"After his bride, I suppose," said Madelon, rising.

"He's fled," answered the Marshal, "openly—a man, a vile fellow, but now stopped me in the street, as, in my haste and something of a confusion, I came on foot; and this fellow in a chair thrust his head through the window to tell me that Clement had gone—his bags and his pockets full of spoils. There's something in that—Clement's found out something. He was always long-headed and cautious and damned selfish."

"Where is Casimir?" asked Madelon, peering at her father.

"Casimir's here; he has ridden off to his estates—Casimir's a treble fool—he drinks, and riots, and rakes, with the police knocking at his door."

"I'll go to the Residenzschloss," said Madelon, "I'll go to the Elector. My father, do you know that I have a fancy to return to Arnsdorf? Nobody's been near Arnsdorf since last summer, and I've a mind to go back there. There's a thing or two I would fetch."

"Arnsdorf!" repeated her father, thinking that she was crazed. "What should you go to Arnsdorf for, and what should you fetch from there? The place is of an ugly memory and of a purpose I have let it go to decay."

"May I not have some time or whim?" smiled Madelon. "I please you so often, my father; and in this I would like to please myself. I thought this afternoon when I have seen the Elector I would drive out there and look at the old place again. There are books. You know that Steffani is Master of the Chapel to the Duke of Lüneburg-Brunswick? It was Delphicus did that." She smiled tenderly. "Delphicus had a generous heart always. Well, there are some books there in the library that have never been moved, and I would send some to old Steffani—he won't refuse to take them from Madelon, though he cares little to hear of the Countess Rocklitz, as I suppose."

"What's all this now?" demanded Marshal von Neitschütz, fretful, alarmed, "it is childish in you, Madelon."

"I've had it in mind many a day," replied she, gently, "and I think I will go either this afternoon or tomorrow. There is a certain old virginals, too, which belonged to my great-grandmother, sir, prettily wreathed with flowers though a little cracked."

Marshal von Neitschütz snatched at her arm as she was passing him:

"What do you want with these things, my girl?" he cried angrily. "What is at the bottom of all this? You've got all the Elector's treasures at your command—leave Arnsdorf alone."

"I must have something," smiled Madelon.

He did not understand what she meant.

"One cannot contrive without anything, you know." She looked at him so brightly and so defiantly, yet so steadfastly out

of her deep-set light gold eyes that he was almost afraid of her, and drew back, muttering a little, as if to excuse some brutality in his behaviour towards her.

"Well, go to Arnsdorf, if you like, and indulge any other maggot you may have got in your head; but hasten, for God's sake, to the Elector and get him away from that other woman—and find out what that sly hound Stürm is up to, eh?"

"I'll go," replied Madelon, gliding away and smiling. "Trust me that I will go."

Her father left her, calmed by her composure and her certainty of her empire over the Elector.

Madelon at once put on her furred mantle, and gauntlets, and ordered out her chair; but she did not go to the Residenzschloss, but took a longer journey out to the suburbs of Dresden, and stopped the chair by a little wayside church not far from the River Elbe, and went on foot through the streets. It was a pleasant April afternoon, and she noticed that many of the trees were already in bud. She rang the long iron bell at the gate of a modest mansion which stood in its own gardens. The porter denied her admission, but very civilly, for she had bribed him often enough.

"I have never been refused before," said Madelon, "what is this?"

"It is my order, Fräulein, and I may not go beyond."

But presently the man yielded sufficiently to her importunities as to go to the house and fetch his mistress, who came down nervously and hurriedly into the bare cold garden, and spoke to Madelon at the gate, which had not yet been taken off the chain, so that Madelon stood behind the bars and it seemed as if they spoke together through the gratings of a prison.

"Indeed, you may not see him," said this lady, "'twas the last orders of the gentleman when he was here only the day before yesterday. He said that no one was to see him without his orders—"

"But I have been before," pleaded Madelon, desperately, "he knows me—he looks forward to seeing me. See, I have brought

something for him—a pair of buckles for his shoes." She put this little present through the bars, holding it out steadily in her gloved hand.

"It will not do, Fräulein," replied the lady, sadly; and Madelon remembered that these had been the words used by Pastor Knock. "Indeed, it will not do. I may not go beyond my orders."

But she spoke with regret, for it was difficult to resist that lovely face framed in the shadow of the deep hood, pleading so eagerly, that soft voice, entreating so gently, those golden eyes flushed with tears, those hands clasped through the bars holding out the little gift.

But she was a loyal and an honest woman, and a little afraid of the man who paid her and her husband so handsomely to execute one little charge, and she resisted courteously, definitely.

"I fear, Fräulein, that you cannot see the child again."

"Could you bring him to the gate?" asked Madelon, "just to the gate, and I could give him the buckles and shake hands with him? You, perhaps, could hold him up for me to kiss."

"Indeed, Fräulein, it goes to my heart to deny you, but I could not do that."

Madelon moved back from the bars as if something had pulled her violently away, and there was that in her expression that the other's kind heart could not well endure, so she called after her, "I can tell you this, Fräulein, if you are so set on seeing him, if you were to go round the house a little and walk on that path by the river, I would bring him to one of those windows and hold him up, and then you could see him well enough."

"I thank you," said Madelon, in grateful accents, "I thank you, I do indeed. Will you give him the buckles?"

She dropped the little gift through the bars into the other's reluctant hand, "Round the river, did you say? I will go at once."

The other woman looked after her wistfully; she did not know who this stranger was who came at long intervals to see the child who was her charge. "Perhaps his mother, estranged in

some dreadful manner from the father—it seems cruel that she has been forbidden to see him."

Madelon hastened round the side of the house, regardless of the mud on her shoes and skirts, and the keen wind blowing from the river. When she reached the other side of the house she glanced eagerly up, her lovely face glowing with pleasure and expectation, the boy was there in the window-place, with a little blue sash, and a grand look about him—a bold, handsome, dark child, with black curls and slanting black eyebrows, fine straight features—a delicate copy of his father.

He was delighted to see Madelon and waved his hand, and called to her to come in and play with him. Madelon shook her head, kissed her fingers in return, and promised to come again, when the trees were out, and they could walk by the river and play ball in the gardens. The child was vexed at the delay, and smiled, beckoned and invited; Madelon stood at the end of the garden and watched him; then the woman behind pulled him down gently and gently drew the curtains across the window; the house was blank in the grey weather—

Madelon turned away and walked through the mud, the rain blowing on her, to where she had left her chair, and was carried to her own house in Dresden, where she changed her dress and was driven to the Residenzschloss.

It was now late in the afternoon, and Madelon thought there was an unusual number of people in the palace, gathered together in groups, and grimacing and many of them looked very curiously at her and some with more hostility and menace than she had ever noticed before. She heard the whisper—"the Rocklitz—eh, the Rocklitz." No one spoke to her, not even any of those who were usually most forward to flatter her. One or two of the women even ventured to shrink away from her with an ostentatious air of disgust. Madelon took no heed of any of it, but went directly to the Elector's apartments which, she was told, the Electress and Herr Knock—unaccountably returned to the palace—had just left. Madame Rocklitz thought that when she passed the sentry at the door the man looked for a second

as if he would bar her way; she did not lower her head or hasten her steps, but walked through the antechamber crowded with people who seemed amazed and almost frightened of her presence, to the bedroom of the Elector.

A negro guarded the half-open door.

"Tell your master that Madame Rocklitz wishes to see him."

She heard the Elector's thick voice:

"Madame Rocklitz, bring her in, bring her in."

The negro pushed open the door wide and she entered.

Johann Georg was alone.

There was a book, which she instantly recognized as the Bible, under his hand, and as she entered, he thrust into this a folded blood-stained paper. It was the confession that Françoise de Rosny had signed after torture. He had read it through and through that afternoon, and all his being burned at the insolent indictment, at the foul, vile horrors that had been practised on him, that had been designed to make him an heirless man and had succeeded in making him a murderer; for he knew now that she had bought a love charm for Haverbeck.

Madelon paused on the threshold, arrested by his dreadful look.

They gazed at each other, divided by a world of terrors.

TWENTY-FIVE

"Why," asked Johann Georg, as she sank with an exhausted air in the seat beside him on the low Chinese couch, "did you not come before? I have been expecting you all day."

"I heard that you were not well," whispered Madelon, gravely, "and that the Electress was with you, and you know that I never come at moments of ceremony or when she is here; I waited until you were alone, and you," she added, panting a little, "never sent for me."

Johann Georg had promised them to give her up, yes, he had agreed to part with Madelon; he had almost consented to hand her over to her punishment. They had told him she was a witch in league with the devil, surrounded by imps and familiars, an accomplice of that vile woman who has signed the list of abominations he had shut hastily into the Bible—a paper which must contaminate the sacred Book. They had been at him all day, with his good, sad wife pleading and weeping. Herr Knock, the earnest pastors, Ferdinand Stürm with his bitter, sound sense—they had all told him what Madelon really was, witch, harlot, murderess, devil's bait. Tomorrow the House of Neitschütz would have fallen—the pack of them would be in the Koenigsberg.

But Johann Georg had pleaded for tonight—pleaded with himself for that—one more night with Madelon. . . . They had told him, in their separate fashions, that she was vile, that from the first moment when he had gone to Arnsdorf and she had given him what tasted like new wine, she had held him in foul spells; he had listened and shuddered and trembled; yet he had been frantically glad to hear of this for it was his excuse for a hideous deed that sat heavily on his mind. If he had not drunk

her nauseous mess—if she had not damped his face with her horrid drugs—he had not committed or ordered to be committed (for never could it be said that he had done it himself) that crime in the Koenigsberg. That was, indeed, his worst grievance against her—bewitched and bewildered by her, mad with jealousy—poisoned (as the night at Arnsdorf he believed now he had been mad not only with passion but with her drugs)—he had commanded that crime. . . . Yet even all this grew faded and vague when he saw her. . . .

Johann Georg stared at Madelon trying to reconcile that wistful, delicate beauty with what they had told him of her. Ha! there were things in that confession to make a man retch . . . the devil's paramour, Herr Knock had called her and Françoise de Rosny had sworn to seeing fiends enter her chamber at Arnsdorf, that chamber that he, Johann Georg, had been ashamed to enter . . . it was true that Stürm had said drily that probably the woman spoke out of malice and delusion, and declared that in his opinion if Madelon Rocklitz had had lovers they were in human shape—"a neighbour or a groom," he had sneered, and Johann Georg had writhed in a deeper humiliation; better a fiend than that! Stürm, though he stated he believed Madelon Rocklitz to be a wanton who dabbled in drugs and even, at need poisons, refused to see any magic in the affair, but blamed her bitterly, in secret conference with the Elector, for the murder of Haverbeck. There seemed now every reason to believe that this unfortunate gentleman had withstood the shameless arts of Madelon Rocklitz, either out of disgust or loyalty, and who was to put that right? Stürm had accused the Elector till the wretched youth had groaned aloud and clutched his thick, upspringing hair.

The minister had replied sternly: "Rid yourself of the Rocklitz, who has brought you to this."

The Electress had pleaded with him, argued her sufferings since she came to Dresden, her early fear of the Rocklitz—"that first evening when I saw her in the mirror over my shoulder I knew it was not a human face." She lamented her barrenness,

a spell was on her—did he desire to see the end of the House of Wettin?

Horrified, distracted, weakened from his recent sickness, Johann Georg had consented to their entreaties—he would part with his mistress—her father, her brothers (he had always loathed them) should go to the Koenigsberg, and she—well, he would punish her, but they could not bring him to promise the torture chamber and the stake—Madelon's tender white body that he had covered with kisses to the executioner and the flames! He had flung out at them, raving at the suggestion; it was enough that he would send her away; Herr Knock said he was still manifestly under a spell and prayed bitterly for his release.

Contemplating now the silent woman beside him, Johann Georg remembered that—a spell—and Madelon a witch—Madelon, who looked tired and sad—Madelon, who leant towards him and stroked his hand lovingly. Surely if this was an enchantment it was one of the devil's most subtle enthralments.

Impossible, thought Johann Georg, to associate her with evil or guile or treachery; and with eager greediness he thought of the hours yet before them—no matter, with the coming of the dawn, the rising of the sun, might come her punishment and his—for tonight they could forget everything, even the blood that he had spilt . . . let that all go . . . she was his Madelon and was with him . . . alone, the others with their reproachful looks and clamouring tongues shut away.

Shyly and with almost a childish gesture he caressed her frail hand where it lay on his knee; all day long when they had been tormenting him with their denunciations of her, he had been secretly longing for this, that longing would show, Herr Knock would argue, the extent of the bewitchment . . . Johann Georg was glad that it was early yet, for the night would be long—a clear respite before the horrors of tomorrow.

"What have you been doing today?" he asked, drowsily.

"This morning I was at home at work at my frame and reading an old book or so, and talking with my women. This after-

noon my father came to see me, something disturbed; and, after that, I went abroad a little, and took the air."

"Where did you go?" asked the Elector.

"I went out of Dresden, towards the suburbs and by the river—all the ice and snow have nearly gone."

He stared at her, wondering why she had gone to see the meeting-place which must be desolate enough—he knew "towards the river"—the little church—a wayside tavern. Then he remembered the child, and flushed. Of course, she had been there—without prudence as without shame.

"I saw," whispered Madelon, softly, "many trees coming into bud, hawthorn, lilac, and jasmine; although the spring is late it is here at length, and quite suddenly; the river, too, seems to flow more gently—I think it is to be a pleasant season; and we will go away to Moritzburg."

He thought: "How I wish we could—she and I in Moritzburg, away from everyone—how different she makes everything, even though all they said is true, I scarcely care. What does it matter, after all, if sometimes she's been in Haverbeck's arms or in the devil's embraces—if sometimes she can be in mine? There must," he thought, in a wild palpitation of regret, anguish and fear, "there must, despite them all, be some way out for Madelon and me."

He was so exhausted after his sickness, and the long arguments, and his wife's tears, and the pastor's preaching, and Stürm's quiet, stern reproaches, and the horror of last night; with Madelon seemed rest and peace. . . .

Madelon Rocklitz felt compassion towards the young man who seemed so uneasy and troubled, so sad and so broken; she thought of him as he had been only six months ago.

Who has changed him—who has changed us all? she asked herself. His only fault had been in loving her . . . the only blame was on herself, Madelon knew.

"Don't let anyone else come in," he muttered. "I'll tell the negro we'll see no one—you and I alone tonight, Madelon. Perhaps we can get it more clear—some way more clear."

He rose heavily to put these orders into execution—the negro, the sentry, the gentlemen in waiting were all told he was not to be disturbed. . . . Shuddering on the couch, she waited his return, for Madelon Rocklitz was frightened at last—frightened because of what her father had said which had struck deeply into her mind—because of the flight of Clement—even Casimir was not in the Residenzschloss or even in Dresden—she was quite alone; all her enemies had pressed away from her as she had gone through the corridors and the chambers—they were hatching something, Herr Knock, Stürm, and the Electress had been with him; and she—she had gone, a reckless, love-mad fool, to get that potion which Haverbeck had thrown in to the ashes. What if her ancient governess was arrested and confessed to that? There was much against her—why had she always dreaded the thought of witchcraft and the Koenigsberg? Of all things she could not endure that. If there was the least suspicion—if they began to talk of torture—she would have to destroy herself instantly. Perhaps, she thought, her mind darting to and fro over the incidents of the last few days, perhaps that was why she had snatched up and paid for so highly that third bottle in the case that Madame de Rosny had shown her with a malicious leer, telling her that it was the most useful of all, and never failed, although potions and philtres might sometimes not do their work. Yes, this could be relied on—poison . . . she had it in her pocket now.

It only was, as Madame de Rosny had whispered to her, a wise and simple precaution against far worse horrors than mere death.

As the Elector returned she tried to put all this out of her mind—after all, it was only a phantasma of a dread, a ghost of a horror, something vague and intangible snatched up out of dreams and whispers and hints.

The Prince, the man who held her fate in his hands, loved her and she must make him love her yet more, blind him to everything he saw, everything he heard against her—that was her only safety and her father's safety and her brothers' safety. She had

lost her head and her wits over the coming of Haverbeck—lost both when she had sent for him. But he had gone now, and she, like someone stunned after some mortal blow, must begin to regain her self-control; her true lover should not elude her, her soul would grope for his yet, but now she was in jeopardy.

Madelon seated herself beside the Elector and talked to him, lucidly and reasonably, of plans for the future, the spring, Moritzburg, the war, and the first campaign. She did not mention Marshal de Haverbeck. Through all her pretty talk the Elector listened for that name.

Madelon Rocklitz's speech was strange and mechanical. She longed to escape; she felt she could not spend the night with this young man—she wanted darkness and solitude, all the candles quenched and the room shuttered against the moon.

If only Delphicus would let her have his child; and in the back of her mind she began to scheme how she, with all her money and power, might get hold of the child on one excuse or another; the child was necessary for her peace, almost for her sanity. If she had had the child tonight, for instance, she would not have felt so sick and tired. She could have sat beside his little bed and watched him, and arranged the coverlets about him if he turned, and been ready with a smile if he woke. She could, in fact, have woven a fine illusion that this child was hers, and he, the father, at any moment, returning to both of them.

But this was not so.

She must sit here with all these candles burning (as it seemed to her) with an insufferable blaze, speak to this man and please him and invite him to caress her, because she was afraid of the shadows of the Koenigsberg.

She heard his voice impinging on her thoughts; she had become slow in her speech, and hardly knew herself what her words were, save that they were a form and a pattern at which she was very clever, woven for his amusement. . . . Breaking into this form and pattern came his voice asking her about her dress, to change her dress—what she wore was heavy and not pleasing to his taste. She had indeed attired herself carelessly,

it was a formal gown and though rich, dark; the Elector reminded her of a flimsy robe she had once worn like that which appears to flutter round the rounded limbs of a classic statue. He told her to put that on, since she had never worn anything that had pleased him more.

"Not tonight," said Madelon Rocklitz, "not tonight." "I am not in the humour for it," rose to her lips; but she realized that she had passed the point when she dare have humours. It was his will henceforth.

"Tonight, I say tonight," he repeated, and emphasized the words. The last night—his precious night—he would have out of it everything he could—there was no future for him and Madelon; only tonight.

She rose to obey him—a slave before her master, fearful of his frown, of the note of impatience in his voice. In the adjoining closet were many of her robes and jewels. As she passed through his room she could not forbear remarking on the Bible, and laying her finger tips on the heavy brass bound cover, asked:

"Why have you this here? It is not usual."

"Herr Knock brought it," he answered, sharply, "there are terrible things in it."

"I know," smiled Madelon.

"Dreadful threats," murmured the Elector, wildly, "against people like you and me, Madelon! *'I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against adulterers.'*"

"Who is God that he must threaten so?" trembled Madelon. "He knows that we must go our ways and sin until there is no longer any flesh on our bones, and then that we shall lie under His hand quietly enough."

"Do not touch the Book," muttered the Elector, "do not touch the Book. I do not know why they left it here. Go and put on that robe, Madelon, and come back to me at once."

Madelon Rocklitz remained by the Bible, staring at the end of paper shut between the leaves—what was it?—why had he got the Book there?—why had he spoken of adulterers and sorcerers?

"Do you dare stand there?" asked the Elector. "What did

they read to me, Madelon? *'For behold the Day cometh that shall burn as an oven; and all the Proud, yea, and all that do wickedly shall be stubble—'* burn, Madelon! burn!"

"What is that?" she stammered.

"The end of the Book, Madelon—ay, they had it thrust under my eyes—ay, there is more of it—*'for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the Lord which he loved, and married the daughter of a strange god!'"* He glared at her and laughed. "I expect she was beautiful, I almost married you, Madelon."

"Do you listen to them," she murmured, "when they talk to you of these judgments—the bigots, the sour, spiteful, old people?"

"I listened," he answered. *"Adulterers and sorcerers!* They shall be punished—*'Their flesh shall consume away while they stand on their feet and their eyes shall consume away in their holes and their tongues shall consume away in their mouths'*—all your fair flesh, Madelon, and your bright eyes and your sweet tongue burning to ashes! Oh, God!" he groaned, "I am in the mire of iniquity—oh, God, save us!"

"How have we sinned," asked Madelon, fearfully, "that we should be dreadfully punished? Why are you so overthrown? These gross humours are but superstitious dreams, vapours of the brain—we have not done any great wrong, you and I, Johann."

He gazed at her and his anguished mood of violence and terror turned to one of clarity.

"You sold and I bought," he said, quietly, "what has no price nor market—if God is just He will punish that."

It was dreadful to Madelon that he, slow, stupid, and confused as he was, should flash out this grim truth; his hot, heavy blue eyes were sad and wise, his full mouth trembled like a child's lips before it weeps.

"Tomorrow—tomorrow," he added, "but tonight let us forget—you will not burn tonight, my young darling, either in the Market Place or hell—no, I will hold you close, close, and we will shut them all out—"

"These are horrible words," shivered Madelon. "Will you not save me from my enemies? Burn! Johann! Burn! What have they said? I know no magic. Johann! You will protect me! Think how often you have loved me utterly—"

"Loved?" he repeated. "Loved? Once, yes—I was afraid to lay flowers at your door—yes, even in my thoughts I did not profane you—a spirit more than a woman to me—but what did you and yours do with that exaltation of mine? You traded with it because of what I could give you"—his voice was rough with pain—*"traded,* eh, that foul bargain, those three who waited—and you ready with the bonds, and I drunk, drugged, damned!"

"Oh," whispered Madelon, leaning against the wall.

"And since then? We have gone down—down—down. Loved you? I have lusted after you, utterly, Madelon—that is what the Book speaks of—Sin in bodily shape—Lust. I have not loved you since that night, Madelon. And you never loved me at all."

"Are you not, at least," whispered Madelon, very faintly, "sorry for me?"

"Ay, I am sorry for all of us—I hear a howling and a crashing in my ears—I believe what you gave me scattered my intellects—Madelon, the time goes, put on your thin robe, and we will try to console one another."

Madelon Rocklitz stumbled as she crossed the threshold of the closet which had been already lit for her reception. She was very tired and frightened; she had only tonight in which to undo the effects of her folly—she did not want to die—she must not be dragged to the Koenigsberg . . . tonight she must win him again, ah, if only she knew the spells they credited her with knowing! . . .

The tall mirror, the square sections joined by narrow bands of blood-red glass, filled one side of the high room, pure wax candles were in girandoles either side, one above the other, so that pyramids of starry flames lit the closet. Vases of onyx wreathed with scaled serpents, sharp petalled flowers and iocund

satyrs in bronze stood either side of this mirror; the costly cabinets were of precious marbles from Italy, rose, saffron, violet, green. The sweetwood press had twisted golden dolphins for handles.

Madelon pulled at these and took out the robe which the Elector had commanded . . . it was chill in the closet as she undressed, and now and then she paused to listen; she thought that from the outer room she could hear him talking and muttering to himself, and, as she thought, sobbing. Certainly her enemies had been about him filling his ears with poison; and she felt so cold tonight—cold in her heart, in her soul, in her limbs. She could not be gay and amusing, and entice him, and caress him with any fervour or ardour.

"I must—I must—I must amuse his senses or I shall be in the Koenigsberg."

She steadied herself, staring into the mirror at her own body, white as if frozen, perfect as if immortal.

Lovely enough, surely, even when looked at by her own wild frightened eyes—lovely enough . . . And she had never failed with him yet; she had let very long go by—how long was it?—days perhaps, when she had been absorbed with her love, dreaming over her love, cradling it on her knee like a child.

"Now he's gone, and that's over, and I must save myself this way."

She put on the fine web of muslin that was like a veil over her limbs—bare feet and ankles, arms, wrists, neck, and bosom, pale and chill in the rich candle-lit closet. She let down her hair, then coiled it up, then let it down again, and rearranged it two or three times with pins and combs, glittering, sparkling, and then nervously paused again to listen; surely he was whispering to himself, beating the cushions and sobbing?

Madelon Rocklitz stooped and from the pocket of the gown she had taken off sought for and found the last of the three bottles Madame de Rosny had sold her . . . she slipped this into one of her silk stockings, tied this in a knot, and laid it underneath the gown.

From a drawer in one of the marble cabinets she took out a perfume that he had always liked, rubbed it over her hands and ankles—it was often his pleasure to kiss her ankle—then glided into the bedchamber, soundless, with her bare feet on the thick Chinese carpet.

He was murmuring, and, perhaps, moaning to himself, and plucking at the cushions on which he leant. He seemed to sense her presence, for he looked up at once and was calm, and Madame Rocklitz almost believed that she had imagined she had heard that whispering and muttering and sobbing—like a pleading and a reproach that had come through the door between the bedroom and the closet.

He looked at her eagerly, put out his hand and caught hold of her, in a passion of impatience, as one who snatches a precious object from threatened peril or oblivion.

"Ah, that's Madelon—that's my Madelon again—that's how you used to be."

"I feel," she said, with a faint smile, "as if years had gone by since we knew each other, and it's only a few months."

She was relieved by the change in him; surely he had forgotten his wild talk, or before morning she could make him forget.

He pulled her down beside him on the couch, the open fire in front of them gave out a steady, drowsy heat. He began to kiss her forehead, her neck, her hands, and arms. When he began to kiss her mouth Madelon believed that she could still smell in his breath the drug she had given him, and with difficulty kept herself from jerking her head away.

They were interrupted—voices—an altercation—a knocking at the antechamber.

"Your friends and my enemies, I think," said Madelon Rocklitz, rising from his embrace, "they would save you even now."

Despite her fears, her fatigue, and her reluctance for the part she must play tonight, she had struck the right note in what she said, for she had roused his courage and his pride.

The Elector rose in a flaming rage, and in a deep passion lurched across the room, pulled open the door, and shouted to his

gentlemen, demanding hoarsely and violently what was this infamous disturbance?

It was Stürm, it was Herr Knock, they had heard from a dozen affrighted tongues that the Rocklitz had gone straight to the Elector's apartments and taken hold of him again, and was, likely enough, weaving her enchantments around him once more. . . . They were there with their several excuses, to—as she had said—save him from the wanton and the witch—Colt was there too, with appalling news.

But they were too late, and their coming at this hour showed that they had been frightened into less than Stürm's usual subtle tact.

Johann Georg stormed at the outrageous intrusion.

"My God, was he never to have an hour to himself? He believed that all they had told him was a concoction of lies. Let them look to it if they disturbed him again. No, he would see neither the pastor nor the minister on any business however urgent. He was not concerned with any of their confounded affairs. Did they think him less than a man that they strove so to harass and lead him?"

The infuriated young man sent off the negro, the valets and gentlemen from the antechamber, and with his own hand savagely locked and bolted the doors on all of them; he then flung back into the bedchamber and fastened the door of that, too, and dashed the heavy keys down on a side table so that the thin green marble top cracked.

Madelon Rocklitz had put her fur-lined mantle over her light robe, and stood silent by the fire. She did not know but that this might end in her instant arrest.

When he returned to her flushed with his quarrel on her behalf, she felt a certain warmth of gratitude to him, a certain softness and compassion and kindness that came near enough to the love that she was forced to assume; the worst terrors seemed to be over; he was her friend and protector.

TWENTY-SIX

Johann Georg lay drowsily back on the couch. He had a sensation of pleasant relief from mental pain and torment. This room, warm, luxurious, closely curtained in, so that it was impossible to know the season of the year or the time of day, seemed to him like a refuge amid all the torture and confusion which had lately been in conflict about him. He drank out of the tall silver-gilt beaker set with topazes, which Madelon had given him, and smiled over the greenish curl of the wine. All they had said in their denunciation, some so cautious and some so violent, about her witchcraft and her incantations, all the atrocities that were contained in the papers that Madame de Rosny had signed with bandaged and bleeding fingers, had become vague in the mind of the Elector. He had soothed himself by saying—tomorrow—tomorrow he would take it all up—tomorrow he would discover the extent of her guilt—tomorrow he would be able to measure and control his own infatuation. But not tonight. His love and passion for Madelon were now mingled, for the first time, with the sensation of mastery; never had she been so submissive to his will, his commands, his half-hinted wishes. It was, he thought—but still uncertainly and dimly—as if the woman were aware of the terrible weapons being forged against her, as if she knew what was shut between the pages of the Bible Herr Knock had left on the table by his bed. She was exerting herself to enthrall him. She arranged her hair and headdress with scarves and jewels till she appeared like the Italian picture called *Leda,* which he always kept above the bureau in his cabinet. She glanced over her shoulder as her face in the portrait glanced, and he applauded her likeness to that long-dead beauty. She robed and disrobed for his pleasure.

She put on a gown lined with ermine, laced tightly about the waist, with spreading skirts of glittering satin and soft heavy velvet. She walked up and down in this like a marionette and he clapped his hands, lounging on the couch, for she seemed a queen indeed. Then he made her take it off and sit beside him on the couch in a bedgown of white satin, after she had brought him the casket containing all the jewels he had ever given her—the casket that was almost too heavy for her to carry. She put it on the floor at his feet; he tipped it over with his foot and picked up the spilt contents—necklets, bracelets, chains, collars and stars of Orders, and fastened them round her neck and arms as she sat obedient, as if she had been a doll for his amusement. Then he became impatient with the glitter of the strong emeralds, white diamonds and red rubies, and would have none of these, but decked her in the Saxon pearls of such a deep lustre and colour. Many of them had belonged to another Magdalena Sibylla, wife of the Elector, Johann Georg I, the interlaced cypher "MS" was worked on several of the costly objects. The Elector held them up and watched the sparkle in the light of the fire and the lamps. He rejoiced at them, laughed at them, and threw them into Madelon's lap. She could, at length, endure this play no longer.

"You give me too much," she said in a low voice. She hated all this splendour as much as she had once longed for it. She unclasped the necklaces of coarse pearls and let them slide down her bosom.

"Don't put anything more on me, I don't want anything more," she added.

Johann Georg dropped the jewels and stared at her closely.

"I'll tell you a story, Madelon."

She smiled, knowing him to be fond of relating tales, which he told not unskilfully. He had learnt in his childhood a great store of knowledge of legends of old Saxony, of the kobold who haunted the silver mines and the creatures who dwelt in the woods and trees; and from his mother he had learned of the tales of icy cold Scandinavia. Such crude and lively fancies interested

him, she had no doubt that he saw himself in his own recitals, that he would like to think he was one of the knightly heroes who had ridden through a bewitched, black, deep forest, and had struck out right and left at the encroaching spirits of evil; she had seen his fair, flat face flush and his large fine hands clench as he made wide gestures of repulsion and defence against these invisible horrors. . . . But it was not such a tale as this that he was about to tell her now.

He snatched at her and drew her close to him and spoke over her head, which she had to rest on his breast among the tumbled laces.

"Last night, Madelon, a man was executed in the Koenigsberg."

"Alas," sighed Madelon, "and what was his offence?"

"He had outraged me, Madelon, he had stolen something that was mine—at least, I thought so. And may not a prince take a swift revenge? That is what power means, Madelon. I said the word and it was done. I gave him a pastor and half an hour. Then it was done."

"I know nothing of these things," whispered Madelon, "and have I not entreated you not to tell me about them? I loathe the Koenigsberg and all the tales of it."

"To kill a man like that," whispered the Elector, not heeding her interruption, "that is a frightful deed, is it not, Madelon?"

"You know I do not want to hear how it happened, that I dare not ask." Madelon clung tighter to her lover and hid her face in the laces on his bosom.

"What do you mean, how it was done? It sounds as if you speak more of a murder than an execution. Four men went into his room and despatched him," murmured Johann Georg, in a very low tone, so low that, close as she was, she could scarcely catch the words. "I suppose they strangled him; a strong young man would make a fight for it, would he not, Madelon? He was not armed."

Madelon shuddered and wondered if this man of whom the Elector spoke was someone in the employ or service of Madame

de Rosny—if this deed which seemed to hang heavy on his soul had anything to do with her father's consternation or the flight of Clement.

"I wish you had not told me," she said, uneasy and troubled; "this was to be a night of peace and pleasure, and we were to talk of Moritzburg and the spring-time."

"Never mind," said the Elector, with coarse simplicity, "it is the first man I have put to death, Madelon, and, as I do believe, I was not rightly in my senses."

"Poor wretch!" shivered Madelon. "It is frightful to have so much power. A human creature may scarcely bear it. Was Count Stürm in this?" she asked, curiously apprehensive.

"Ferdinand Stürm," replied the Elector, stupidly, "is a devil."

"Let us," whispered Madelon, "converse of something agreeable. I must vanquish this overcrowded humour of yours with some gaiety."

"I think," muttered the Elector, suddenly seizing her hand, "that I'll never be gay again, or else I walk in a mist of phantoms and some ugly vision that will not lift even with the day."

His blue eyes stared over Madelon's head as if he were searching some far distance for an expected and dreaded apparition.

"And I was once merry enough," he added; "I thought there was no prince in the world as grand as I when I had you first, Madelon."

Her low rich voice answered him with a steady assurance that his passion was not extinct but smouldering.

"It is only a little cloud that has come between us of hesitation and doubt—we must love each other, we must."

"What has come between us?" interrupted the Elector, with an eager sullenness. "What has come between us?"

And he wondered if, even while now she lay in his arms, she would mention the other man's name—the name of the man who had, indeed, come between them, whom she had summoned from Vienna, who had hurried to obey that summons, and paid for his boldness terribly. Would she evoke that grand figure, splendid and formidable, which had indeed come between them?

—was between them now, however tightly he might clasp her, however resolutely he might stare that phantom down.

But Madelon Rocklitz mentioned no name. Neither of them brought on their lips their secret terrors, and fears, and shames.

Madelon had the more quiet conscience and the serener mind; she did not even have the thought of that terrible paper in the Bible which came now and then to distract her lover, and she could dwell on pleasanter themes than he—vague, uncertain, impossible themes, but sweet enough. She was so young and would be beautiful so long. . . . Surely, she and that man driving to Vienna to be rid of her enchantment must meet again. She was weary, fatigued, and wished to sleep so that these incredible dreams might come to her more sharply. But she exerted herself, remembering her father and the flight of Clement, and the possible danger for all of them. This was her moment, now she had him in her power; perhaps tomorrow all her enemies would be flocking about him again and poisoning his weakness against her.

"Have you," she asked, "dismissed Count Stürm? Is he not somehow at the bottom of this trouble you are in?"

She felt his breath heave beneath her and break in a half-sob.

"Stürm is a devil," he repeated, hoarsely; "a treacherous, difficult, clever devil! Have you not noticed how like a fiend he looks—his pale malevolent face, the way he walks about tapping with that cane? If it hadn't been for Stürm arresting him, I had never—"

He broke off.

"He's been a devil to me, I doubt not," murmured Madelon. "Send him away, he works in the dark against me. He tells you lies. He will make dark insinuations and there will be no truth in any of them."

"What do truth or lies matter, Madelon," said the Elector, wearily; "kiss me and hold me, and let us take what we can before all is lost."

She had no strength or spirit to urge him further. Everything must wait until tomorrow. Tonight, she, too, would en-

deavour to find some oblivion in this distracted, marred and most unhappy passion, which he had said was not love—to drink her wine and kiss her kisses, and forget.

She believed that he would sleep where he sat, holding her, but he suddenly put her aside, with a movement of almost rough vigour and again commanded her to attire herself for his pleasure.

She must go to his cabinet of Dutch walnut and bring out more of his jewels; she must pull open the drawers of his cinnabar lacquer cabinet and bring out his collars and chains; treasures that his father had kept jealously locked in the green vaults this young man kept recklessly in his bedchamber; he flung her a key and she must unlock a *garderobe* of cypress wood and bring out his swords and lay them at his feet; all this Madelon did obediently.

"Tomorrow," he said, thickly, "we may go to the hells Herr Knock is so sure of—but, tonight we'll have what people get damned for, eh, Madelon?"

She trembled before his mood. He made her light more candles—wax tapers on the mantelshelf, on the bureau, on the table with the Bible, on the table with the wine in a rock crystal flagon, on the table with the cracked green marble top and the keys, so that all in the chamber was brightly illuminated, save the upper part of the bed, shadowed by the stiff curtains of scarlet Venetian brocade surmounted by coronets of purple ostrich feathers, radiance over everything, the walls with dancing nymphs blooming in silken threads, Danaë with her gold, Leda among the reeds, Europa, Io, the luscious white heifers, the crystal chandelier cut to a thousand facets of myriad-hued brilliancy, the thick straight velvet curtains, crimson, purple, shutting out darkness, cold, spying eyes, reproachful glances, with branches of golden trees and silver blooms of fantastic plants; radiance on the young master of all this himself in his wide skirts and huge cuffs of shot silk, grey, rose, lilac, covered with knots of tinsel and roses of bullion; his square-toed shoes with scarlet heels and huge roses of gilt thread—on the young slave

of all this, shivering, obedient, in her satin bedgown and her fallen hair yellow as an autumn crocus that blows above the dead leaves and has neither root nor fruit. With his flushed blue eyes on Madelon Johann Georg laid out his treasures—five collars of the Golden Fleece of different stones, onyx, Hungarian opals, cat's-eyes agates, Bohemian grenates, zircons of red flushed with orange, all mounted with diamonds, all striving to emulate the most beautiful and perilous of the elements, fire. From one collar hung the largest carbuncle in the world—angry yellow, blazing red, a clasp from the helmet of Mars.

"Like flames, Madelon," he smiled, "like flames, eh?"

She begged him not to throw these fiery chains about her neck, and he dropped them on the couch where tiny Chinese figures stared from the white silk; he played with his diamonds now—garters to be buckled beneath her knee, aigrettes to be fastened in her hair—a zone for a waist, a flawless diamond *"a regarde moi"* to hang on her forehead above her frightened eyes.

All the brilliants were reddened from the firelight; she put them off; she entreated him to adorn her no more; he again poured himself wine and, lifting the beaker with both hands, drank.

"We are very pleasant here, Madelon—how could I have listened to those villainous rogues?—they were jealous of me, ah, jealous, bursting with spite and envy—that scoundrel, Knock, will be biting his fingers with malice!"

He laughed: was he not the wealthiest prince in the world, possessing the most beautiful woman? He gave her a cane with a pure round emerald for the knob, then hung round her throat a necklet of male sapphires, blue of India, blue of blue—that was the noblest colour of all! He searched for the Garter, his last and most sumptuous decoration; she must have the blue band across her bosom, her bare bosom, the George hanging against her side, her bare side.

"Sir, desist from this play; my eyes ache—there is too much light and sparkle—"

He threw into her lap pearls from Saxon rivers, topazes from the Schneckenstein—smoky gold in their hearts.

"Do you remember Lilienstein? Last summer? There the fiends worked the mines—you could hear them—tick-tock—their hammers above, below!"

Madelon went on her knees in front of him, holding her white satin about her, disregarding the treasure of the House of Wettin, smiling, entreating:

"Let us put away these precious toys, sir—this is not the occasion."

Johann Georg took no heed of this; he pulled out the marriage chains of his ancestors, the arms of Saxony united with those of Brandenburg, Denmark, Württemberg, Culmbach; but one had a sting for him—*"Prudens et simplex. Christus nos redemit ab execratione legis"* was enamelled on one of the swinging medallions; his poor Latin was good enough for that—everywhere threats and menaces, he thrust his hands into his hair and sat sullen, staring; Madelon crept to his feet, entreating his patience and kindness; she pushed aside the weapons he had made her bring out—his state sword, the Electoral sword, the sabre of Mahommed IV, and the bâton of Kara Mustapha, taken at the relief of Vienna ten years ago.

"I will have your portrait painted, Madelon," he said, smiling again—"Naked, with the Garter and all my emeralds in your hair, eh? And a sword—yes, my great sword in your hand. Stand up!"

She must stand up and drop her robe and put the blue ribbon over her breast and take in her two shaking hands the Electoral sword with scabbard of silver arabesques, the handle being hung with Saxon pearls on Venetian chains.

"It is too big for you," said the Elector; he gave her another, by Andres de Galéfa; it had a crystal handle and was used for official mourning; she stared at him over this hard cross of crystal which was like polished ice on her pale body half-flushed from the fire flames sinking now as the piled wood was consumed; then that would not please him either, and she must hold the

Turkish bâton of chalcedony, agate, with an apple or cabochon of serpentine in which was set a white stone with a yellow eye named *oculus bellicus;* yes, she should hold that in her long fingers, her thin spiral ringlets should fall to her waist, her bosom should swell beneath the Garter and the Fleece, she should gaze over her shoulder like *Leda,* who loved a demon.

She stood, quiet, staring at him—an image of alabaster she seemed; her golden eyes appeared like jewels, too—a little thing of thin fine alabaster that he could break and throw into the flames—Was she worth what they said he must pay—that small weak creature, naked, feeble, trembling before him?

The harsh cold voice of Herr Knock beat on the young man's heated brain: *"Before Him went the pestilence and burning coals went forth at his feet. He stood and measured the earth, He beheld and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow."*

When that Conqueror came he and she would be a little dust on the way; he gazed at the naked adorned woman; she had folded her hands on her breast and waited patiently—an idol—Herr Knock had warned him of idols. . . . *"Behold it is laid over with gold and silver and there is no breath at all in the midst of it. . . ."*

"Madelon, why don't you speak? Are you dead?"

She stirred:

"What shall I say? I stand here for your pleasure."

"For my pleasure?"

Perhaps for his damnation, too—a witch this Madelon, with a body like a blossom, with a pale timid face far more lovely than any of his gems from earth or sea, the devil's Harlot sent to undo him, to entice him to murder, to bring on him the indignation of God . . . *"the mighty man shall cry bitterly, that day is a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness. . . ."*

A day, yes, but there was still tonight.

Madelon was shivering though she stood so near the fire; she

was thinking neither of her nakedness nor her jewels, only of the torture chamber in the Koenigsberg and the pile and stake in the market-place; she did not see the hangings on the walls where other naked women peered at her with pretty, cool eyes, the tangled treasures at her feet, the richly-curtained windows, the bed with the high-placed plumes, the heavy, fair young man on the Chinese couch staring at her—but the grey open day and the gibbering crowds pointing through the bleak mist. . . . "The Rocklitz—the Rocklitz—eh, she is going to burn now, the Rocklitz!"

He was drinking again greedily—her champion, her protector, her master and sole hope; she forced herself to regard him; how gross and sensual he was, the thick neck, the inflamed eyes, the fair hair dark with sweat in rings on his forehead, a bull-like front, heavy, menacing, yet stupid and easily bewildered . . . well for her he was gross and stupid—how else had she held him? . . . He must take her away—away from Dresden and its hounds.

"Johann, the candles are burning down; shall I snuff them?"

"Let them," he said, "burn out."

Madelon ventured to put on her bedgown; he did not interfere with her; she crept to the couch and they stared at each other in a mutual wonder as to the possible hope there was of climbing out of the pit into which they had sunk.

Any possible expedient?

None.

She thought:

"I have nothing but to save myself and them from horror, and the thought of Delphicus. Nothing."

He thought:

"I have nothing but the little body of Madelon, her breasts, her waist, her arms, her lips. Nothing."

He put his goblet down and turned into the cushions with a childish gesture as if he wept.

Madelon glided away; she put off her Ribband, the jewels; the fine pure wax soon burnt down, many of the candles were ex-

tinct; Madelon, pausing on the bedstep, saw the room already invaded by shadows; even the glow of the fire was slowly receding.

"Come to sleep, Johann; there is nothing we can do."

He looked up; she was leaning on the pillows in the great bed, a pale shape in the thick reddish murk of the curtains; sleep, once the easiest thing in the world to him, was not so easy now; he rose, sighing, and took off his coat—"Can't I forget for one night—what she is and what I did?"

If he woke, in the dark, and imagined the stately figure of the murdered man towering over him? Last night he had not been to bed—if he awoke and found that Madelon had turned into a demon in his arms; or saw, piercing his thickest curtains and shutters, the awful Eye of God?

Undressing by the failing fire and half-sobbing, he began to tell the story of the White Bear.

"There was a White Bear in Ireland who was extremely beautiful; it lived in the palace of a king, in a bronze cage filled with icebergs; it was fed on honey, cinnamon cakes and baked pears; the seven Princesses flattered and coaxed it with toys and songs—Are you listening, Madelon?"

"Yes," she sighed.

Johann Georg unwound his cravat and untied his ruffles; with his foot he pushed aside his treasure which had become so much rubbish to him.

"Well, the Bear loved none of them—he had fixed his affections on a little yellow dwarfish creature, ugly as a hop toad—but he could not see that, for the poor beast was bewitched."

"Don't go on; I know the story."

He took no notice.

"The King and all the Princesses became very angry with the Bear, for whenever they gave him any liberty he followed the dwarf, so he was shut up in his cage, and no one came near him but the dwarf—*she* got through the bars and tried to keep herself warm in his fur, for the icebergs were very cold—"

"Johann, come to sleep."

"I'm coming." He stood, tall, heavy, in his chamberrobe, blocking out from her the last light of the fire.

"For all their care of each other the dwarf died of cold and the Bear of hunger, for everyone was so disgusted with it that they would not feed it any longer—" Johann Georg paused, then added, on a sudden gust of laughter, "and its skin made a fine rug for the seventh Princess when the elks drew her over the ice! Hey! Hallo!" he shouted, "over the ice, with the wolves behind!"

Madelon laughed to match his mood; their mirth was pitiful, the laughter of youth betrayed, defiled—amused at its own degradation.

He came to the bedside and gazed down at the Bible; she feared that he would open it, but he turned into her closet and put out the pyramids of wax tapers either side the mirror; hearing him moving there, she feared again that he would stumble on the third bottle knotted in her stocking; but he returned, absorbed in his own challenge of the dark he was defiantly creating; he pulled the snuffers down over the remaining candles and there was only the receding glow of the wood ash on the hearth; as he flung himself on the bed beside her he begged her to tell him a story; he kept looking over his shoulder, beyond the shadows of the curtains, into the room filled with that vague wavering light.

"What are you looking for?" asked Madelon.

"Nothing. We are alone, are we not? Tell me something to divert me, Madelon."

She also was glad to take her mind off their circumstances; as the dark increased he drew closer to her; she believed that the strong young man, always so unconsciously brave, was afraid—eh, of what?

She spoke of the isle of Rügen—why?—because this tale was in the *Germanicus* in the library at Arnsdorf where Delphicus de Haverbeck had written his name under hers—Rügen, where the conquerors of Rome were bred. Odoacer, King of the Rügii,

overturned twelve centuries of glory when he marched into the Imperial City; he was a Saxon, the same race as Johann Georg.

"You remember what it says in *Tacitus,* Johann, of the untrodden wood of beech trees, no human foot entered it—dark, deep, wide, it lay by Sagard, in the midst of the Black Lake in which the sun never shines because the trees crowd over it so; in the wood dwelt Hertha, the wonderful, unseen goddess; sometimes her car would come to the Black Lake and her white cows would wash in the dark clear water, in those mysterious glades was a stone of sacrifice—"

"Be quiet," whispered Johann Georg; he had suddenly realized that she spoke of heathenish matters and that those remote and lonely groves which he found so soothing to hear of were the haunts of the ancient fiends—why had she chosen to speak of the Herthaburg, the Hertha See, of Rügan infested by the old gods? He silenced her with desperate kisses; in the dark he was not ashamed to weep a little; as their faces pressed together their tears mingled, for Madelon wept, too, for some dreadful and intangible grief; each sought frantically in the other for some oblivion, however brief, some opiate, however costly; they felt each other's breasts heave with sighs . . . only to forget for one night—for one hour!

Madelon slept; hand-in-hand with phantoms she travelled dark ways through the untrodden wood to the black lake where the white cows bathed in the deep shadow. A scream in her ear woke her:

"The White Bear was not starved to death; they strangled him—he fought with his naked hands!"

Madelon soothed him, speaking half out of her own dreams; he woke and did not know what he had said; they comforted each other in the dark, and slept again.

Madelon roused in the daylight, as she thought it must be, though the room was curtained against the morning; the fire was out, the air chilly; she recalled how violently he had locked them in the night before, shuddered out of bed and pulled the curtains,

unlatched the painted shutters; broad day—noon by the silver pendule above the bureau with the ransacked drawers, a void sky in which an Eastern wind beat, a vague, uncertain and sickly sunshine. Madelon was ashamed to see the jewels and weapons on the floor; so they would say she brought her lover to squalid debauchery and childish extravagance; she put away the swords in the *garderobe* that served as armoury, flung the Orders into the drawers, the jewels into the caskets; she had no longer any desire for any of this plunder for herself; the gems and metals seemed harsh and cold in the austere daylight; Madelon put on her robe of swansdown and satin and looked at her lover; he slept as soundly as on the night when she had drugged him; she drew the coverlet over his bare breast and put back the tangled coarse hair from his eyes, not without tenderness—had he not promised her last night, between his desperate embraces, to protect her from her enemies?

At least she need have no gross fears of the Koenigsberg. Madelon picked up the keys from the cracked marble table, unlocked the door, crossed the antechamber and came into her own apartments; here all was neat and orderly; the stove lit, the chocolate equipage, the toilet appointments ready; warm perfumed water in a silver basin, a sheaf of jonquils in a Meissen vase; Gertrude, most deft and sly of the favourite's women, was in waiting, precise from her painted face to her gauzy apron, alert, servile, with her hair trunks corded (and much of her mistress's property therein), but soon to be uncorded if the Rocklitz should return to power.

TWENTY-SEVEN

Everyone in any way connected with the fortunes of the House of Neitschütz had been for the last few days considerably on the alert, and although they had been something reassured by the fact that the Rocklitz had once more spent the night with Johann Georg, still they could not altogether shake off the uneasiness caused by the strange rumours that were abroad—persistently, thickly abroad . . . at the mutterings and protests that surged before the Elector's locked doors.

This sly woman then came eagerly forward and still more eagerly glanced at her mistress's face to read the signs of defeat or triumph there.

Madelon understood the look and smiled in self-contempt. She yawned and bid the woman poke up the stove. The room seemed both close and chill; she herself both exhausted and sick of slumber.

"The Elector sleeps," she said; "leave him till he wakes and bring me some chocolate here."

Then, shivering into a chair, she asked:

"Did you hear any news last night, Gertrude? Was there any talk in the Residenz?"

The woman was usually quick in picking up the least hint of gossip and Madelon remembered that she, herself, had been enclosed in the Elector's room since the early evening.

"There's news enough, my lady," replied the neat woman, shrewd, discreet, civil, but prying and malicious, going about her business the while and poking up the stove, and setting the lamp alight under the chocolate equipage. "There was this letter I was to give you, madame; there was a pastor who brought it to the court and had some difficulty in gaining admittance; he was

very persistent and wished to deliver it into your own hands; he gave it at length to me, and said there was something for you within, but he has put it in this outer cover and sealed it up himself."

"It is, I dare swear, some usual begging or petition, some denunciation or threat," thought Madelon de Rocklitz, for she knew in what terms the clergy thought of her, and she put the long sealed envelope which was carefully addressed *"Madame the Countess Rocklitz"* behind the azure porcelain clock on the toilet table.

"What is the news you heard last night?"

The woman Gertrude would continue to talk of the pastor, how haggard and ill he had seemed, so insistent to have his letter delivered; how he had hung for hours about the court, trying to find someone to do this for him until a page (to whom he gave a gold piece) had taken pity on his importunity.

She was very anxious for her mistress to open the letter and see the contents, so she ventured to bring it down again from behind the clock and place it on Madame Rocklitz's lap.

Madelon broke the seal idly; she was weary and her head ached; the day lay before her long and filled with unpleasant duties; there was a great deal she must find out in the next twenty-four hours, many enemies to face, many strange incidents to untangle; she must discover where Madame de Rosny was? Why Clement had gone? What cause her father had for anxiety? What game Stürm was playing? And she must consolidate herself with Count Spanheim and Sir William Colt, who had paid for her services, they would expect some return and were her best protectors.

The inner letter fell out of the sealed envelope. This was merely tied round with a black ribbon.

As Madelon de Rocklitz was carelessly untying this, the woman busily foaming the chocolate said:

"The great news, madame, is that Marshal de Haverbeck was found dead in his coach not many miles from the frontier."

She had heard, of course, that there was a great deal of talk

about the favourite and the Envoy, and she peered at her mistress with cold curiosity.

Madelon Rocklitz neither moved nor spoke and the woman thought that she was not interested or very clever, and proceeded to embellish the news.

"It was most sudden and there are the strangest tales! Sir William Colt and Count Spanheim were like men in a fury; it was partly for that they came to the Elector's room last night, and were for disturbing you. They say the oddest things. The talk is that the doctor says—a seizure, a fit; but he was the healthiest man, and young. Then they talk of the old wounds he got in the last campaign breaking out, but there was some servant who could not be silenced who said there was blood on his laces and shirt. I do not like to say what I've heard—but it is rumoured that he went to the Koenigsberg. His coach fetched him away from there and so straight over the frontier, and a few hours afterwards, dead in this manner!"

She stopped on a sudden, observing something unnatural in the attitude of her mistress. Bending over her with sharp interest, she saw that Madame Rocklitz, still sitting upright in the deep chair, was quite insensible and the letter that had been tied with black ribbon was still unopened on her lap.

Gertrude was a woman of resource; and smiled a little—"Moved, eh, she favoured him!"

She had her drops ready and forced them between the cold lips of Madelon Rocklitz, rubbed her wrists and her bare ankles, and dashed water in her face; she was relieved to see her mistress quickly revive from what seemed to have been but a passing spasm, and for which she gave no explanation; this was curious to inquisitive, spiteful Gertrude—that she should so suddenly have passed into a fit of insensibility and so suddenly revive from it and seem in perfect command of herself; she spoke and moved sternly as one whose heart is in abeyance, whose mind is in command.

"Go now, Gertrude, and do not disturb me; I have some matters to discuss with the Elector."

The woman left, though with reluctant, curious glances.

Madame Rocklitz followed her and turned the key in the lock of the door leading to her own apartments. When she knew herself alone, she fell down by the chair and pulled at her bare bosom silently, as if she would pluck her heart out, then her staring eyes discerned the letter which had fallen to the floor and in doing so it had half-opened, and she read the signature—*"Delphicus Secundus Hyacinthus Lüneburg de Haverbeck."* She snatched it up and read it, and the whole was plain before her. This was the man whom Johann Georg had destroyed in the Koenigsberg and he had allowed him to believe that it was her doing. Haverbeck died thinking she was his murderess.

Madelon Rocklitz looked round stupidly for some method of immediate destruction. She had no other thought in her mind; she stared at the chocolate foaming over on to the table and the flame of the lamp. There was nothing in that room, and she ran back into the bedchamber still searching for one of those swords or daggers, then her maze of agony was broken into by the sight of Johann Georg still sleeping heavily in the great bed draped with red Venetian brocade. She stepped to the bed, mounted the bedstep and, grimacing, stared down at him. He had done that murder and kept it secret from her. He had dared to steal her body again last night; while he had been embracing her her true lover had been lying in his shroud and would never know that she had been innocent of his foul death. . . .

" 'It is in your power to kill me and in my power to die smiling, so we stand equal at the last.' "

Johann Georg turned and groaned in his sleep as if troubled even in that deep slumber by the strength of the hatred that bent over him.

Madame Rocklitz glided into the little dressing-closet—she had remembered what was knotted in her stocking; she turned over her fallen clothes and found the length of silk, and took out of it the little bottle which Madame de Rosny had given her when she had last visited that black establishment in that ill-famed street.

How ready it lay to her hand! as if she had known yesterday of this necessity, and made all prepared. She came back to the bed, put aside the curtains, and looked at the flushed supine young man; if she poured that in his ears, in his nostrils, forced it between his lips, his sleep would shudder into annihilation; it would be so easy, and a punishment so mild for his unspeakable crime. Madelon, rigid, bent over him; little pictures flicked into her mind—the White Bear—the untrodden wood—their mingled dreams—his terror—of what?—of Delphicus? He must have been mad with jealousy, with shame, with her concoction; he had been kind and honest once; she had murdered his soul as he had murdered the body of Delphicus; her brain worked clearly in this state of suspended emotion; the bottle fell out of her hand on to the bedstep, and rolled from there on to the Chinese carpet.

Madelon Rocklitz fetched a long sigh; she went into the closet where the shutters were still closed and the curtains drawn, the light thick and most uncertain, and there dressed herself in the first gown that came to her hand and put in her bosom the letter tied with the black ribbon. Creeping back to the bedroom, she again looked at the sleeping youth. He had, after all, no responsibility in her fate; it was she—and she alone—who, as Delphicus de Haverbeck had written, had twisted their fortunes awry.

She saw the Bible and opened it with a light touch. The heavy Book fell apart naturally where Johann Georg had placed Madame de Rosny's confession. This bloodstained document lay staring under the eyes of Madelon Rocklitz. She read a few lines of the denunciation and the twice repeated faltering signatures beneath. She read the passage in the Book where the paper had been folded:

"I saw by night and beheld a man riding up on a red horse and he stood among the myrtle trees . . ."

There are myrtle trees at Arnsdorf—

"behold all the earth sitteth still and is at rest."

Madelon took her hand from the book; behind it in one of his gloves was the little toy they had brought back to him—the

golden egg with the ring and signet and the mottoes—*"Toujours fidéle," "Toujours constant"*—Madelon stared at the confession; it accused her of abominations.

It did not occur to her to destroy this. She left the Bible open, with the confession lying there for the firstcomer to see; it did not, any of it, matter at all to her. She peered again curiously at the sleeping man—the stranger whom she had violently, through pride and passion, forced herself into taking as a lover. She left his room and traversed the Residenzschloss. As she passed from one chamber to another she saw the people, anxiously gathered in these corridors, draw away together and murmur "The Rocklitz! The Rocklitz!"

Count Spanheim, fuming and disturbed, stopped her and asked her if he could immediately see the Elector? She was, after all, his pensioner, and he spoke with some peremptoriness.

"This story of the death of Haverbeck," he said, harshly, "has an odd, ill sound; he was not the man to leave Dresden like that. And what was he doing at the Koenigsberg?—what deposition and what witness should he have gone to hear? He left his friends on a sudden with no excuse, and he was no man for that. Those wounds in his breast were but slight, and if they had broken out would not have killed him."

Spanheim peered into the shadow of her riding-hood as he spoke. Why was she wearing a hood so early in the morning? And he wondered at her, even through his absorption in his own particular trouble and vexation. He decided with a sense of surprise and almost of alarm that she was not a beautiful woman, after all; her features were strained, almost distorted, her upper lip drawn down, the lower contracted; she had no bloom or colour at all; her hair was oddly draggled and dark with sweat on her forehead.

"I have no longer," she said, "any concern with any of these matters, nay, in no matter whatever."

Spanheim, who had so highly bought her services, thought this insolent:

"And you," he said, in a high tone, "have been with the Elector

all night, madame; you must know something of how affairs stand."

"I know very well how they stand," replied Madame Rocklitz, "but they are not for my handling."

She passed, leaving him yet further bewildered and uneasy, and left the Residenzschloss with a stern air, and called the first groom she saw and asked for a horse to be brought from the Marstall—a quick, fresh palfrey; she mounted and rode away without company or escort through the streets of Dresden, and here, as in the palace, the people gathered in groups to watch her go; she heard them draw together and murmur among themselves—"The Rocklitz! The Rocklitz!"

She went directly to her father's house, and left her horse with a startled groom (who came on her urgent knocking at the gate with her whip-handle), mounted the stairs quickly, and came into her father's cabinet.

Neitschütz was but just out of bed, and wore a long gown of flowered sarcenet and a velvet cap above his yellow darkened, furrowed face. Knowing that his daughter was with the Elector, he had passed the night with some comfort, but his ease left him now. He thought, with a most horrid and poignant pang, when she opened the door and glided towards him, that this was not Madelon, but the ghost of his dead wife come again to reproach him for his wickedness.

"My father," she said, putting out her hand as if she feared he would touch her; "cross the frontier and warn Casimir—Clement was wise. We shall all be denounced today. I have read the confessions of Françoise de Rosny—she accuses us all of witchcraft—and abominable horrors."

The heavy gaunt old man sank down into his chair by the bureau and began to whimper like a spent hare, he clenched his fists and beat them on the table, and broke into vile imprecations.

"That thrice-damned devil, Stürm!"

"Father," said Madelon Rocklitz, "it is ourselves and, more than any of us, I—who are damned."

Neitschütz stared at her—mouthing, glaring, breathing hard, not understanding her awful serenity; still with that half-horrid, half-crazy doubt, that this was indeed his dead wife, who had often wept so silently before his cruelty, come to drive him out of his mind with terror.

"I have greatly sinned," added Madelon Rocklitz, "and God has struck me justly."

"Say, rather," cried her father, cursing, "say, rather the devil is in this."

"Ay, the devil is in it, but who invoked him?" asked his daughter, and added, and there was a softer, more tender note in her voice, "Let us forgive each other, my father; do you forgive Clement and Casimir, my brothers—as it may be some day we shall all be forgiven. We have been together in this infamy. Father, I did love you once and tried to please you. Save yourself and them."

The old man attempted some answer out of his horror and dread at her words, her appearance, at the hideous weight of the blow that had so swiftly fallen.

But Madelon was gone—as lightly as she had come—and out into the courtyard, and had mounted her horse again and ridden through Dresden towards Arnsdorf.

TWENTY-EIGHT

An east wind blew across an ample sky that scudded fragmentary wisps of cloud into the upper dome of air. All traces of snow and frost had melted from the fields; the trees had relaxed from their winter stiffness and here and there had broken into hesitant, reluctant green. The orchard trees remained bowed under the invisible weight of winter and even the earliest flowers had only blown timidly yet, the spring had been so late, so stormy and so cold. But the weeds grew strong and straight—broad bright leaves on fine straight stems beneath the hedgerow and in the flagged paths of the garden at Arnsdorf. The whole landscape—the garden, the park, the fields, were wild and bare, swept continuously by the eastern winds.

Gottfried, the gardener, had come up from the cottage on the estate where he lived with his wife. He was the sole caretaker of the château of Arnsdorf; now that Marshal von Neitschütz had risen to such heights and owned so many estates much more magnificent and majestic, he had no longer any interest in this at all, which, perhaps, even Gottfried, who was a peasant and stupid, might guess, had not the pleasantest of associations and memories. Here the children had been brought up in the sharp harness of poverty, and here the old Neitschütz had largely dwelt himself, since his wife's death, under the dominion of the governess who was, as Gottfried and his wife thought, a wicked woman; so, indeed, it was not peculiar that he had left the château to some amount of ruin, for he spent no money on it and neither he nor his sons ever visited here. Gottfried had his wage and his bit of ground, and did what he could with neither much loyalty nor much illwill. He had locked up the mansion and never entered that, and, as for the gardening,

that was beyond him and he was not permitted to hire labour. He came in and out to see that thieves and vagabonds had not trespassed, that the bolts on the doors had not been forced, and that the gates were locked at night. In a loft above the stables in the courtyard he had had a great store of winter apples which was now nearly exhausted; there were, however, sufficient left for a day or so. His wife had asked him to fetch them. This was the scarcest season of the year for fruit—a late bitter spring and food dear.

Gottfried, then, a hearty man of middle age, came into the courtyard at Arnsdorf, whistling and singing to himself, and stamping his feet on the hard stones, for the chill was penetrating, and so approached the stables to the left of the small courtyard.

He found the door open and believed that he had at last caught some trespasser on the property of the Lord of Neitschütz. As he entered the stable with eager indignation he saw a horse in the stall and a lady standing beside it. He did not know her; she was, as he thought, dressed very grandly, but not for riding. Her head was hooded, her cloak fallen back, and for all the severe hard spring day, her bosom was bare, save for a fold of lace. She looked at him pensively and Gottfried felt uneasy and distressed.

"Why, it's Fräulein von Neitschütz!" he exclaimed, at last; and then, stupidly, "So you've come home?"

"Yes, I've come home," replied the lady.

"I mean Madame Rocklitz," he added, embarrassed. "There's nothing ready. I never knew. There has been no message."

"No," said Madame Rocklitz, quietly, "there has been no message. I have come here for a purpose of my own. Do not disturb yourself, Gottfried, but look after the horse. I expect there will be people after me before very long, but I do not know where I shall be. Tell them to search for me, and they will surely find me somewhere."

Gottfried stared at her, liking neither her words nor her

looks, yet not knowing what it was he did not like. She seemed to him to be covered with grey mist; he could not see her at all distinctly; he reminded himself that the stable windows were foul with dirt and dust, that the light here was worse than dim; she lingered in the doorway, looking at the old pear tree on the wall that though the earliest to blossom was yet barren.

"Where is Faggott Spray, my little horse?"

"I keep him down at my cottage, Fräulein."

"I hope you are kind to him—you know, I wanted him in Dresden, but I thought he would be homesick in the Marstall."

"Yes, Fräulein, we are very fond of him."

Still she lingered.

"Do you remember the jasmine by my window?"

"The black frosts killed it, Fräulein."

"Yes, that is very likely. Persian jasmine—I thought Spanish. There are no flowers out anywhere, Gottfried?"

"No, Fräulein, not yet."

"No. A terrible spring—the snowstorm, the other day—Why is that dove sitting on the roof?"

"That is the last of your pet doves, Fräulein; they flew away when no one fed them, all but two—a pair they were. I gave them some grain this winter."

"Thank you, Gottfried; where is the other?"

"Dead. Dropped down dead yesterday, nay, two days ago, in the storm."

"Dead. Yes. Dead. Why doesn't this one fly away?"

"It has got a wounded wing, Fräulein; besides, it's waiting here, hoping its mate will come back."

Madelon looked at the huddled forlorn shape of the little bird on the roof.

"Have you the keys of the house?" she asked.

Gottfried, still stupid and awkward, gave them to her, and protesting that the château had not been looked at; that had never been in his instructions, nor his wife's; they had kept the place locked up since last summer—nine months or so now. . . .

Madelon Rocklitz took the keys without answering, and the

fellow, partly alarmed, partly curious, thought that instead of returning home as he had intended he would wait and see when she departed, what she did, and who was following her; he had quite forgotten about the apples. . . .

Madame Rocklitz, walking steadily, moved past him, out of his sight. She turned round the hornbeam hedges now spread into a thicket, and paused by the empty fountain, which was filled with a rime of moss and mildew. She did not glance at this but at the stone seat, now green beneath the bare hornbeams.

"It is only," she told herself, "to have a game of make-believe, and I can have it sitting there. He has just come from Paris, and it is amazing how he has grown! A young man now, and I am still a child and must play with the children. He does not look at me, he has a book, yet I do not think he looks at that either—he has his fingers in it to keep the place. His clothes are of a new fashion and very fine. How handsome his dark hair is, where it curls on his shoulders! Now he is speaking to the governess; she has come round the hornbeam in her russet dress, and he seems displeased with her; he has risen and gazes at her coldly. I wish he would look at me. All our paper boats are sinking, and they are clamouring for me to make them more. Now he has gone into the house and I must follow him."

She turned and went to the blank-fronted mansion, with its mean yet grim façade, unlocked the door and entered the vestibule, where the shabby placid busts scowled and grimaced out of the dusty shadow.

"Where has he gone?" she asked herself, pausing. "Where shall I find him?"

Madelon Rocklitz entered the large pretentious chamber where they had dined the last night she had spent at Arnsdorf.

She opened the shutters and looked round. The room was in neat order, the chairs set back against the walls, the table placed straight, the wooden escutcheon hung in its place, but it had not been cleaned, and a mist of reddish black obscured the brilliancy of its rubbed colours.

"It will be taken down," she thought, "and set with its face to the wall, or destroyed, and no one will ever see it again."

She went upstairs to the library.

This was undisturbed; no one had troubled to close the shutters in this neglected, little-used and ill-valued room. In the wide space of the windows the bare trees tossed and creaked in the east wind. The books were straightly set in the shelves, and there was a bloom of damp over the leather. The virginals were on the table. She touched the notes gently; they were soundless. Her fingers travelled over the sides where were the wreaths of flowers under the cracked varnish. She took out his letter and read it again—the second time she had looked at it. "I love you . . . I came from Vienna because I had to see you again . . . a sinner and a lover."

It was quieter in the old library than she could have believed any room could be. She held the letter to her lips and stared across it into the solitude.

"When I heard he was dead I died, too. I have heard of that—men dying and walking on for a few steps, and no one knowing that they have been mortally struck."

She put her fingers to her heart and was surprised that it was still beating.

"Here he stood—here he spoke with me; here he has watched me when I have taken my lessons, when Steffani has been at the virginals, patient and kind. There is no limit to love and no limit to suffering—Steffani told me that and I smiled, for it seemed to me stupid. . . . I understand now what he meant."

She went up to her bedroom.

There were the curtains she had broidered herself hanging straight from the small bed. Her chamber had been left carelessly, in haste and confusion; Madelon stared at the dressing-table. There had stood that glass and flagon which Johann Georg had thought of afterwards as containing poison, and it had held nothing but some of their home-made wine.

She sat down on the bed-step.

If she did not die soon she would have to destroy herself, as she

had intended at first. She was amazed that she did not die. She had thought, riding along the great post-road, she would fall from the saddle suddenly, and she had counted the rhythm of the horse's hoof-beats: "one—two—three—four—and now I roll down —he tramples over me and I am in the dust and mud. . . . One —two—three—four." . . . But the horse had arrived at Arnsdorf, and then she had thought: I shall die when I see the old house again.

But she had not died; she had dismounted and put the beast in his stall, and seen Gottfried, and spoken to him reasonably, and thought—"Well, I shall die when I see the fountain again and the seat where he sat." But she had lived to enter the house. When she had seen the blotched escutcheon she had not died, even then. And now she was sitting on the step of her bed—sitting and breathing. The solitude was intolerable. She began to writhe in the extreme of fear, to snatch in cunning desperation at her game of make-believe.

"He's coming upstairs somewhere in the house—we shall never be parted again. I shall go away with him—nothing else will matter. I will not endure it—I cannot endure it. Nobody could endure such suffering. I'd rather be on the rack in the Koenigsberg."

She began to unhook the curtains of the bed.

"There is a God and He is just."

The curtains fell down as she loosened the cord.

She tore up his letter—that was their secret; no one must know.

"They strangled him in the Koenigsberg."

She tested the cord with her hand.

The east wind rattled at the window and mingled with the sounds of human rage and fear.

They were after her—a tumult and a pack; the law and all its hounds—her enemies the citizens, the curious and the cruel . . . a witch-hunt in good earnest—who would not join in the chase after the Rocklitz who had bewitched the House of Wettin?

Gottfried, seized by the firstcomers, admitted her presence in the château; admitted that she seemed like one possessed of the devil—transformed. . . . Why, he had hardly known her. He guessed it was something like this—witchcraft from the first; he repudiated her, though he had been fond of Madelon, and began to pray.

They had been close behind her; she had not had long in her solitude. She had ridden away openly and very many, cowering back into their doorways and windows, had seen her pass. The Rocklitz riding fast!

The soldiers and the rabble, riding, running fast, too.

The château door stood open, the key hanging in the lock; yet many of them hesitated to cross that threshold, but paused there in terror.

The soldiers, under Captain Falaiseau—the stern, staunch man—pushed in. Their blood was up. Count Stürm had read to them the confessions of Françoise de Rosny, had shown them the bottle of poison found by the Elector's bed. ("It's God's miracle that it has somehow failed to do its work.")

The guards knocked over one of the pedestals and the grinning Cæsar fell and was broken into shards. The rabble pushed now into the large room where the Elector had sat the last night he had spent at Arnsdorf, and pulled down—as Madelon had known they would pull down—the florid, grand, flamboyant coat of arms, and slashed at it and hacked at it and trampled it under foot, venting on it their terror, their fury and their revenge—soldiers struggling with the crowd in a sudden combat.

Captain Falaiseau ran up the stairs, calling aloud:

"Madame Rocklitz, Madame Rocklitz!"

He flung open many doors on empty rooms, and then found a door that was locked. He hammered on it with his sword-hilt. He could hear her inside, speaking in a low earnest voice, entreating someone to forgive her, to pardon her, to pity her in her great wretchedness.

"Madame Rocklitz!" cried Captain Falaiseau, sternly, "open the door!"

The poison found by the Elector's bedside had caused him to abandon his mistress to her enemies, but Falaiseau did not believe that Johann Georg would wish the worst to befall a woman he had loved so deeply. It was the soldier's intention to arrest her and protect her from the malice of the crowd which had gathered hotly on her track; to put her on his saddle and hurry her to the safety of the Koenigsberg.

"Open the door, Madame Rocklitz," he insisted, "and I will protect you, on my honour—the soldiers hold the people back—I am Falaiseau of the Guards."

The voice within continued, rich, soft, gentle and winning, and Captain Falaiseau shuddered.

He could judge in those tones something of the charm that she had had for Johann Georg, that she might have had for any man. Probably it was a scene with him that she was rehearsing now—so would she fall on her knees and argue with him, and bring him back to her arms again. . . . Or, was she pleading with God?

"Madame Rocklitz! Countess Rocklitz!"

She made no reply, and was silent.

Falaiseau called up two of his men and told them to break down the door, standing himself in the way ready, with his hand on his sword, sternly keeping back the alarmed and violent press; the stairs were crowded with her hotfoot hunters, leering, grinning, yet over-awed.

The door soon broke from the simple lock and Captain Falaiseau sprang into the modest room.

He had an instantaneous impression that he came into the presence of two people, that one—a tall man—stood between him and the woman on the floor, and made a movement, stately and grand, to hold him off. But this impression vanished, proved indeed a delusion, and he found he was alone with Madame Rocklitz.

She had taken down one of the homely embroidered bed curtains; it was tumbled in a heap close to her recumbent body.

The bed-cord was in her hand—she had not had need to use it. She was dead, still warm, but breathless.

They knew not how—without doing herself any violence she was dead. Her body was not stained or marked, and they could find no trace of poison. She had used, perhaps, some subtle drug, supplied by Madame de Rosny; Falaiseau, though believing her a wicked woman, was glad she was dead.

How had she died? They were frightened as the news spread, cheated and sullen; they lingered, angry with the soldiers who guarded her room— How had she died?

Captain Falaiseau, though not a superstitious man, could not but remember that tall figure he believed he had seen standing over her and, in a manner, protecting her. Her familiar, her demon, the credulous would say! But, of course, a trick of the shadows and his own excited mind.

The soldiers laid her hastily on her bed and hurried away. She was so beautiful again now, and looked so gentle; she seemed to put them all in the wrong; Captain Falaiseau was sorry that she would be buried like a dog in unconsecrated ground.

While the meaner sort stumbled and fled from the château and the garden, fearing a demon at every turn, the grim soldier remained in the humble little bedchamber and, picking up the curtain which she had torn down just now in frantic hurry and confusion, spread it over the wasted beauty of Madelon Rocklitz, and said a stern bigot's prayer; bitter churchman as he was, austere Protestant and hard-hearted, grim man Falaiseau prayed sincerely for this sad outcast; she was so young. . . . *"We walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquets and abominable idolatries. . . . Who shall give account to Him Who is ready to judge the Quick and the Dead? And above all things have Fervent Charity among yourselves, for Charity shall cover the Multitude of Sins."*

Perhaps, even for Madame Rocklitz (the soldier pulled the coverlet so that he could not see that fallen coronal of saffron

locks—she was so beautiful . . .) perhaps he could find some simple holy pastor who would sit with her until she could be moved, watch in this neglected chamber which yet had a fragrant air as of a young maiden's room.

Captain Falaiseau wondered as he went down the shadowed stairs and sent his awe-struck soldiers about their several duties, why he was not thinking of Madelon Rocklitz at all, but of Marshal de Haverbeck, whom he had recently escorted across the frontier, who had sat so still and upright in his corner, wrapped in his military cloak to the chin, with his hat pulled over his eyes, and the slightest of smiles on his bloodless face. Why should he think of Delphicus de Haverbeck lying on his black-hung bier in an Austrian church so many miles away?

The curious, fearful crowd searched the château and the gardens for signs of charms, for incantations, for familiars, for some sign of horror and enchantment, some mark or glimpse of the invisible world.

But the prowling rabble found nothing all that windy day of cold spring but one wounded dove, waiting for a dead mate, that died of terror and loneliness in their hands.

THE END

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